SIGN OF FIRE *by* E. HOFFMANN PRICE

25¢

Adventure

A POPULAR PUBLICATION

APRIL

KENNETH PERKINS

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

GORDON MacCREAGH

A CARADOSSO STORY BY
F. R. BUCKLEY

Let's Give
RED CROSS WAR FUND

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RED CROSS WAR FUND

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Adventure
(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 110, No. 6 for April, 1944 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

Of Glamour and Gunpowder (a Caradosso story) . . . F. R. BUCKLEY 40

In which the swashbuckling Luigi gives his Lord Duke Pietro, a lesson in love—as dangerous a pursuit as any other passage at arms—and illustrates the respective values of sword and arquebus *versus* alchemist's brew in putting to rout any and all assailants, be they girded with Cupid's darts or merely attacking at the head of a cavalry troop.

The Judgment of Quilado . . . . . KENNETH PERKINS 66

"It is my warning that you flee this city tonight!" screamed the skeleton-faced monk at the guests in Don Pasqual's gaming-room. "Scoff at me if you wish, but I know the signs. I heard an underground roaring in the rain forests and I know by the flight of the birds and the yodeling of the toucans—" They all thought he was a Jeremiah and a nut until Quilado spoke, punctuating each phrase with flaming brimstone.

SHORT STORIES

At Long Range . . . . . GORDON MacCREAGH 32

The man in coveralls—the civilian—looked at the two tons of charging rhino, then turned to his companion. The captain, who knew more about men than he did about African fauna, seemed to realize that he was out of his element. "Good God!" he breathed. "So what do we do now? There's fifty thousand dollars worth of irreplaceable radio equipment in this car!"

"If I Must Die—" . . . . . ALLAN R. BOSWORTH 62

Jeremiah Bone was as fair a Shakespearean scholar as any ship captain his age who never went to Cambridge, despite the fact that he'd lost four precious volumes of the Bard in as many wrecks at sea. Which explained his determination to save this fifth and final tome if he salvaged nothing else when the Nazi U-boat's torpedo sank the *Mary Jolly*.

The Judas Touch . . . . . JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE 102

We were drinking in a wharfside tavern in Marseilles, Cardoux and I, on the night before Easter, when we met the bearded man. He spun a coin on the bar, then motioned me to pick it up. It bore the face of a man with a big nose and a wreath on his head. "Tiberius," the Beard remarked. "I worked for him once. A real Caesar when Rome was Rome."

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BE OUT ON APRIL 7TH ◆◆◆

The Spy-Gazers . . . . . RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS 110

Ian MacDuin, the *Margie Blackenham's* chief engineer, was the answer to an enemy agent's prayer. When you tell MacDuin anything, you tell the world. No, he don't blab; he just don't hear. By the time ye've strained your lungs on the auld Scot, dinna ye ken, ye've confided in all hands.

Pacific Headache . . . . . LYNDON RIPLEY 142

Planes, PT boats, battle-wagons, destroyers, shore batteries can all take a crack at any enemy sub in sight and if they sink same, fair enough. But drydocks—even floating ones—are supposed to mind their own business—and that ain't combat! The *Wet Smack*, of course, made up her own rules for the game of undersea hide-and-seek.

SERIALS

Sign of Fire (1st of 2 parts) . . . . . E. HOFFMANN PRICE 10

Kane was feeling low. Months of guerrilla operations against the Japs had turned him into an epicure of killing, but nevertheless he felt he wasn't getting anywhere. The Philippines were still a long way from being disinfected of the skibby plague. "We're like mosquitoes. Annoying, and so what?" he complained to Datu Ryan. "Mosquitoes can cause a lot of malaria," the self-starred general answered. "For instance, if we had an undercover radio station in Iloilo and could broadcast right from the Japs' front yard—"

Traitor Unknown (Conclusion) . . . . . M. V. HEBERDEN 120

From the shadows of a Gestapo inquisition-cell deep in the heart of Occupied France a dying voice whispers to Major Brandon the name of the traitor in the London headquarters of the underground. Then begins the ruthless intelligence officer's mad race against time to stave off disaster and betrayal of the United Nations' pre-invasion plans.

THE FACT STORY

The Most Dangerous Job in the World . . . . . HARRY BOTSFORD 97

The mortality is so high, the hazards so great, that no insurance company will accept as a risk any man who works at it. Even soldiers get coverage these days, but not the guy who juggles peacetime blockbusters. He's gambling with death every minute—and nothing in the jackpot but calamity.

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6

Ask Adventure . . . . . Information you can't get elsewhere 149

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The Trail Ahead . . . . . News of next month's issue 158

Cover painted for Adventure by Ralph DeSoto
Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

THREE recruits to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month and a brace of absentees, back in production again, to be heard from. The author of "If I Should Die—" says, on making his initial appearance at the *Camp-Fire*—

I can never become president because I was born in a tent instead of a log cabin. This was in West Texas, 42 years ago. The Old West died hard, with its boots on, in that country and I can remember some of its last kicks.

I enlisted in the Navy after punching cattle and herding sheep, doing a little railroading and door-knocking as a house to house salesman. After four years in the Navy I became a newspaperman, followed that profession for 12 years on the West Coast, then took to the hills and did nothing but magazine writing for three years before what is now dimly remembered as "the national emergency." I have had a commission in the Naval Reserve for 16 years and at this writing have been back in active service for more than three years.

Have had three novels and some 600 short stories published in magazines.

How *Adventure* missed out on all of them all these years we're at a loss to understand, but now that Lieutenant Commander Bosworth has decided to come up to the fire we plan to keep a warm spot here for him. Another unusual yarn from his typewriter is scheduled for next month.

LYNDON RIPLEY, who also makes his first appearance on our contents page this month, writes from California, as did Mr. Bosworth. (Why don't some of these writers live on the East Coast where we can keep 'em under our thumb? *Ed.*)—

I'm just a reflector to my experiences, I guess, and I really don't amount to much, but I'll gladly supply a few facts.

Since 1917 I've been pretty much on the hoof. Following Horace Greely's advice, I left my home in Wisconsin and went West. Homesteaded north of Great Falls, Mont., then enlisted in World War I. I sort of boosted my age endowment, being 41 now, but I got to England with the Signal Corps and, being with the first arriving aero squadron, stuck at Aldershot for the duration, designing parachutes and hedge-hopping a good deal. When peace returned I finished homesteading. Guess I was a queer squatter, 'cause I studied commercial art summers via Federal Schools carrier pigeon and two winters I caboosed with cattle to Chicago and concentrated at the Art Institute.

Then, believing myself to be a Norman Rockwell, I cometed to Seattle and succeeded at once—in writing advertising copy for an agency. The layout training, though, helped. Then followed display space selling on a news sheet, basement copy writing in a block-square cash store—and a recess at selling rat poison and shingle stain. When a boy who delivered engraving cuts tipped me off about an opening, I nearly tore off my good pants racing to apply—and got the job. I became a "publicity director" in a department store. From 1920 to 1932 it was "the publicity game" from Seattle to San Diego. I was "punkins."

Then, being a self-considered Big Shot, a protracted rest was in order. With a Graflex and portable word mill I sailed like Captain Cook for Tahiti, and the next two years were spent vagabonding around the Tuamotou Archipelago. It was good fortune to meet Nordhoff and Hall—two "regular" guys—and breathe the same air at Taravao where R. L. Stevenson lived. Articles to fill a suitcase were written and illustrated and many sold. I told how to build a South Sea home for $25, how to live on $10 a month (a fellow

(Continued on page 8)

LIGHTER MOMENTS with fresh Eveready Batteries

"Fox, old boy, looks as if you'll have to find yourself a manhole!"

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(Continued from page 6)

I knew lived 3 years on $30 on a nearby atoll), how to make an outrigger canoe (natives had known that for centuries) and a lot of other pickup. I even pounded out a 90,000-word manuscript for a book, replete with some 150 illustrations, but it was burned later and half the pictures sold to various publications. The story? Wrong angle. Facts and fiction all mixed up, that would high-pressure flat-pocketed tourists below the equator to disappoint them. I'd seen that, even in my short stay, done before.

Some authorities have said you must live before you write. If painting signs and highway bulletins, being a "display designer" (window trimmer), men's wear salesman, hitchhiker, catalogue compiler, truck driver, photographer, highly flush and nearly broke, along with my other bouncings around, are any help, then I guess I've passed through that phase of it.

Mr. Ripley lives near the only whaling station in the United States from which still sail killer ships whose cargoes of whale steaks, when they return to port, help to ease the food rationing problem in the West. We have a yarn in our drawer by the author of "Pacific Headache" about this unusual industry and plan to schedule it very soon.

HARRY BOTSFORD, third of our trio of recruits this month, who let us have a vicarious session at "The Most Dangerous Job in the World" didn't get the material for his article by hearsay. He writes—

I am third generation oil. Born and raised in the Pennsylvania oil fields, I cut my teeth on tales of the lusty and gusty citizens who put the swaddling clothes on the infant industry. I have worked at most oil field jobs—all of the manual jobs, at least. I have written refinery advertising; and I have handled the public relations of the industry—a grand one, peopled with fine gentlemen.

I served a stretch in the Army during last war; experienced a hellish period when I chopped boiler wood, drove team, mixed cement, built bridges, kept time in a machine shop, acted as an association secretary, worked as a lobbyist, served three years in a bank and had an abortive period as an insurance agent.

Currently, a brand plucked from the burning, I am engaged in public relations work and editing two magazines, *Ships* and *Plane Talk*. I spend my spare time cuffing a portable typewriter and writing for the public prints.

My hobbies: acting as an amateur chef, hunting and fishing and studying Colonial history. I like rye or bourbon, thick steaks, organ music, quiet and rolling hills. I dislike: books written by women, semi-Americans, crowds, hypocrites, the subway and noise.

Just an average guy—that's me.

LUIGI CARADOSSO has been rusticating since February '43, ("Of Sorcery and Swordplay") while F. R. Buckley, his biographer, sailed to England on the voyage about which he gave us some details in "Watch Below" last month. It's good to have the old swashbuckler back with us again and know that neither his wit nor armor have grown rusty *ad interim*. About his exploit in this issue Mr. Buckley appends the following note—

In the title "Of Glamour and Gunpowder," the glamour is of the old original kind, which had nothing whatever to do with Rita Hayworth; it simply meant magic, especially of the deceptive kind. The gunpowder also is early vintage, producing its effects by rapid combustion instead of the detonation to which we have unfortunately become accustomed; but regarded by its contemporaries with much the same dislike we have for poison gas. If historical precedent holds, our descendants in 2000 A.D. will marvel at our objection to asphyxiating vapors, while themselves agreeing not to make war with the newly-discovered M-rays.

The love-potion industry, in Italy of the period, was such a thriving trade that the authorities had to discourage it at last by ordaining that vendors should be boiled to death, and their (almost exclusively female) customers deprived of their noses and ears. It seems to be agreed that the active ingredient of the original love-potions was cantharides; which, as the Borgias knew, is both an aphrodisiac and a violent irritant poison. A few mistakes in dosage would probably convince the potion-mongers that death was an acceptable alternative to love; anyhow, they soon became plain purveyors of poison for unwanted husbands, taking in gold and putting out arsenic. Since the civic dignitaries of that age, as of this, were mostly married men, they naturally would take a poor view of this philtre-mongering.

(Continued on page 153)

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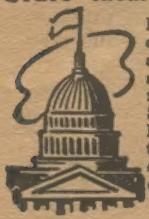

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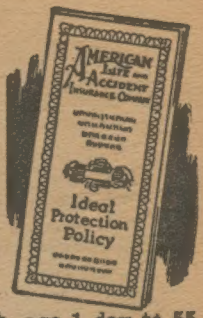

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SIGN OF FIRE

By

E. HOFFMANN PRICE

A frail, little white-haired man, whose eyes must have been failing, passed the deadline. Bushido, *the Japanese code of nobility and honor, was behind the rifle butt which caught him under the chin and knocked him from his feet.*

KANE felt pretty low. While months of guerrilla operations had turned a cadastral surveyor into an epicure of killing, he nevertheless felt that he was getting nowhere. Maybe the levels and transits in his blood gave him a passion for knowing directions.

Datu Eric Ryan, on the other hand, wasn't at all morbid. His four wives, the shapely daughters of four separate and distinct Moro princes, were busy with his gear. Two polished his Cordovan boots; the other two divided their efforts between the silver spurs. When this was done, each would undertake her quota of the four stars the self-made general wore on each shoulder.

"Jim," Ryan said to Kane, "don't look so down-hearted. Diane would send you a picture postal from Australia if the air mail worked a bit better."

Kane smiled somberly, thinking of the lovely stranger he had married to facilitate her last-minute rush to get out of

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

Zamboanga without proofs of her actual American citizenship.

"It's not entirely that, Datu. I didn't expect her to write. It's *that*—"

He pointed at Haji Maulana, the wrinkled little Moro schoolteacher, who, finally forgetting the green silk pants he'd picked up in the Cotabato raid, was honing his wavy-bladed *kris,* and chanting a *sura* of the Qur'an:

"The striking!
"And what shall make thee to understand how terrible the striking shall be!
"On that day, men shall be like moths scattered about, and mountains shall become like wool driven by the wind!"

The old fellow looked as though he contemplated a Moslem paradise jammed with streamlined *houris;* actually, he was reliving the ecstasy of *krissing* half a dozen Japs at Malaybalay. Instead of contemplating the paradise to which he would go, he thought of the smoky Moslem hell to which he had sent them.

Datu Ryan grinned. "Jim, maybe you ought to get religion like Haji. Or there's the old-time religion—"

He spat a red jet of betel juice, and

pointed at the big, black man who towered over a bamboo pulpit in the shade of the *lauan* tree. Hanging from pegs in the trunk was a monstrous *kampilan,* with a grip especially carved to fit his ham-sized hand. Though his kinky hair was white, his purple-black face, all agleam from sweat and fervor, had scarcely a line. Pistol belted over his robes, Bishop Jackson, of the Mindanao Evangelical Church of the Pagan Tribes, preached to the Christian guerrillas.

That they were Catholics made no difference to him, nor to them. "In time of war," he boomed, "you can't expect to git your mammy's and your pappy's religion dished out."

It was the Bishop's singing, rather than his doctrine, which fascinated the guerrillas. Moslems, who had attended services at the little bamboo mosque on Friday, trailed over for some *ersatz* on Sunday. Though they did not know it, they were getting a good substitute for Paul Robeson.

But now he preached. "On this here glorious Sabbath, I am discussing the subject of killing. You all know it says in the Good Book, *Thou shalt not kill,* and look at us, from General Datu Ryan and General Jim Kane right on down the line. And what's Gawd thinking of us?"

His voice held them. It had the music of temple bells, and depth of far-off thunder. Though less than one man in five understood English of any kind, they listened, for they had heard that same voice in battle.

"*Señor Obispo,*" a knotty-legged little Visayan asked, "what is it that the good God thinks, when He remembers us?"

The Bishop fixed his man with eye and gesture: "What the Good Book mean is, don't kill none of yo' own folks. It don't mean, don't kill *no one.* Look at Joshua. Look at Samson, he done slew a thousand Philistines—Ah said, *Philistines,* Ah did not say Philippines—with the jaw bone of an ass. So y'all are doing good in the sight of the Lawd."

Kane grimaced sourly. "The Bishop loves his work, exhorting this crowd on a point they never worry about. We've run a sausage mill, we've cut a lot of meat; only we're like mosquitoes, annoying, and so what?"

"Mosquitoes cause a lot of malaria," Ryan drawled.

ONE of the four queens, the one in the scarlet rayon gown, set a glittering boot on the mat, and then dipped into the silver box in which betel nut, slaked lime, and tobacco were ready for blending. She deftly wrapped up a fresh chew for the *datu,* handed it to him, then started picking stars from his shoulders.

The *datu* carried on. "Jim, you talked just this way about surveying when it got monotonous. Look here, as long as surveying was fascinating, you weren't worth a damn at it, because it was new to you. Like a new wife, fascinating and not worth a damn."

"That's why you have only four, huh?"

"Well, they're the same original four," the *datu* retorted.

Cashiered from the U. S. Army for striking a superior officer in the course of a pre-war argument arising from Lieutenant Ryan's intention of marrying a lovely *mestiza,* he had retorted in a grand manner: He married not one, but four native girls. He clinched the gesture by putting on the stars of a full general and operating his plantation as a burlesque military post and naval base.

"What I mean is," Kane went on, "*this* business never was fascinating. Except to Haji. Hell, what are we doing? Where are we getting?"

If it had been planned by a stage director, the disturbance at the further edge of camp could not have been more perfectly timed. Four Moros in red and black turbans were marching four blindfolded civilians toward the headquarters shacks.

One of the prisoners wore shoes. The other three carried their footgear about their necks. Their store clothes were in bad shape. *Julat anay* thorns had slashed the seersucker pants and coat of the man who was still shod. The white suits of the others were even worse. All had a thick overlay of red earth.

"*Mi general,*" the spokesman of the Moros reported, "these men come to see you. The outposts stop them for blindfolding."

"Unblind 'em, Mahmud! And who are they?"

"They say—this one, he is *presidente* of Kolumbugan town; this one, the *alcalde;* these two, the schoolteacher, and the post-office master. Leading citizens."

"Where's the banker?" Kane demanded, his long, lean face for the first time showing that he could be amused.

"Is a Jap, *señor.* We *kris* him last week."

The dignitaries addressed the man with the boots and the wives. "General, we know you are patriots. We know what you try to do. But what is done? You bushwhack some Japs, very nice. Then is more Japs, and for us, more trouble. Sometimes, one is faced to a firing squad as a lesson. We cannot all join you. We have the stores to run, the fields to plough, and there is the fishing. We must eat."

Kane cut in. "Patriots have to eat. See what I mean?"

But Datu Ryan, for all his kinks and whimsies, his gin, and the sardonic touch which at first glance seemed madness, was a soldier again.

"I understand. There's nothing we can do, is there? *Señores,* we also face guns."

The thin-faced *presidente* bowed, made a pathetic gesture. "We honor you. We do not complain much. But could you—"

He could not look straight into Ryan's bitter, blue eyes and ask the man to quit staging those raids in which humor cropped up like devil's laughter at a funeral. There was that silent invasion of the hemp plantations behind Davao, which for years had been infested by Japs. Not a shot fired. Not a blade drawn. Ryan had gone from plantation to plantation, with fresh, local-grown hemp, hanging farmer after Jap farmer with his own produce.

"Each one's been a spy," he declared. "This is strictly according to the articles of war. Beside, it's damn funny, in a way. U. S. Merchant Marine shy of hemp, and Japs using it at home."

But such tricks made it tough for civilians, and Jim Kane was a civilian at heart. "*Datu,* you're right, but look at these gentlemen. Jap occupation is bad, sure, but the worst has worn off. Even a skibby gets fed up on making an effort to be snotty. These people have to work and eat; they can't keep steamed up, day after day, whispering to their *krisses.*"

The *presidente's* eyes brightened. He gestured to Haji Maulana who still chanted to the wavy blade as he caressed it with a stone.

"*Señores!* That man is happy! *Muy valiente,* because no other thing on earth is so beautiful to him as killing. He loves it so much that whatever danger there is, it is worth it and more."

Haji looked up, smiling. "There is much in what you say, *Señor Presidente.* For years, I taught boys to read, which I liked very much. Now this, again, which I quit in the old days when it seemed no longer to be worth while. Today, nothing else is good."

The *presidente* was losing rapidly. "Sir, you are a patriot. I dare not speak further."

Haji arose, and for all his gray hair and wrinkles, he moved catlike, since

The wrinkled little Moro schoolteacher was honing his blade and reliving the ecstasy of krissing half a dozen Japs at Malaybalay.

swordsmen never age or stiffen. "No, *señores, you* are the patriots. You love your country as much as I do—certainly more, because you can live in it with men who are against all other men. You are more brave than I. You do what you hate to do, I do only what I love."

He made a wrist flick; the blade hissed from cutting air. The dignitaries bowed. Kane offered them cigars and accompanied them to the limits of camp. They weren't collaborationists: They were men who had to eat, men without whom the guerrillas could not eat.

ON his way back, Kane made a circuit of the guerrilla settlement, where a carabao-drawn *arrastra* pulverized iron ore for the dumpy little smelter, and another homemade mill converted charcoal, locally prepared saltpeter, and sulphur from Apo's crater into a black and very smoky gunpowder. When Kane returned to camp, Datu Ryan, his boots on and his stars burnished, was ruefully regarding the tarnished gilt hat cord. He said, "Jap generals don't wear the right kind! What in hell am I going to do?"

"Oh, nuts! I'll get you a skibby general's cap."

"Trouble with you surveyors," Ryan rejoined, "you get an itch when you're not breaking a trail. You worked like a dog, teaching the boys how to make gunpowder. You were happier'n hell! Casting those cannon out of brass cooking pots, that was a real kick."

"So what?"

"You're not crying about the civilians, you're just bored stiff, that's the trouble with you—you—Damn *civilians!* I bet back in the States, hundreds of them are going haywire from feeling useless because they think they're marking time. They want to go places! The blockheads don't know that sitting on their pratts waiting for orders is just as necessary as being in the line.

"Those John Recruits get an itch because they're at field maneuvers instead of fighting. And *you're* griping because life is one round of meat-cutting and MacArthur hasn't come back and the Japs haven't all gone home yet!"

"Mmmm—well, maybe. But I *am* crying about those civilians. I've been thinking about it ever since they shot Don Florencio, in Capiz, for the hell I raised blowing up the distillery. I'm going to do something about it. And I still insist that hanging Jap planters with their own hemp kicked back at the natives."

"Oh, Christ! Sure it did. And then the Bagobos went wild and got some more Japs. What will you do?"

"I'm going to set up a radio station, so we can send news out and get news in. If that *presidente,* if any of us, really knew what was happening, knew we were going somewhere, it'd be different."

Ryan shrugged. "Well, O.K., soldier. So you'll make a radio out of bamboo and rattan."

"Nuh-uh. I'm going to Iloilo. There's Hong Li, a service man I used to know in Zamboanga. I'll get him to scoop up spare parts of one kind and another and put him to work out here."

Ryan ceased being languid and whimsical. Bishop Jackson, whose sermon had ended, was busily grooming Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, a native pony about the size of a Saint Bernard.

"Boss—Mistah Jim, General Kane, suh—you can't do that. You'll sure as Gawd's living git yo'self shot."

Ryan was saying, "You damn-blasted blockhead, with Jap officers being transferred around, you may run smack into Colonel Higashi—and he'd be glad he didn't have you shot the time you were in jail in Capiz!"

"Capiz is some miles from Iloilo. He'd not recognize me."

"You'll go as a nun or something, I guess! And even if no one recognizes you as Kane the guerrilla, you'll get slapped into a concentration camp so fast—"

Haji Maulana laid his Qur'an aside carefully, on a silken scarf. "That is nice, my general. Then we can rescue Señor Kane. With much fun for everyone."

Ryan groaned. "Why in blue-hell doesn't that woman of yours write you! Why don't you get a *prahu* and head for Australia and see for yourself that she's not had that technicality dissolved? But if you've got to have a radio to say, *da-da-dit-dit-daaa, honey, do you still love me?* why, go and get it fixed up quick!"

CHAPTER II

MAN-HUNT IN ILOILO

WHEN Kane came out of the hills behind Iloilo several weeks later, his disguise was a tradition, and his weapon was nerve. He had become a sunshiner, one of those who have missed too many boats. Though the moral equivalent of a beachcomber, he need not live near the shore; he may do his drinking in the jungle.

The breed is diverse. General Datu Eric Ryan might have been called a silver-plated sport-model sunshiner; the other extreme, Crazy Tom, out Parang way, had been named by someone with a gift for understatement. Still and all, there is the typical, the average sunshiner, a chronic drunk "gone native" in a way to disgust any native.

To say that Jim Kane wore pants, shoes, shirt, and hat would be literally true, but very meaningless. While life in a *barrio* is not hemmed in by many sanitary regulations, the natives bathe and they launder their clothes; though sewage disposal is primitive, the people are not personally dirty. Kane ,however, had deliberately become at least as loathesome as Crazy Tom.

He reeked of gin. Not trade gin, not Bols gin, but the stuff made of palm juice cooked off through an old gun barrel. It doesn't require much to give one a bouquet which acts on the principle of a military advance guard; that is, it feels out the terrain for perhaps a mile or so ahead of the main body. Kane's eyes were red, his face was bloated and puffy; mosquito bites, exposure, living alone in the jungle had done this. And now, finally coming to town, he was in character, except that he felt thoroughly uncomfortable, whereas the real article doesn't give a hoot.

The low sun reddened Iloilo's ancient stone buildings and the modern office structures. Thunder rumbled over in Antique Province, facing the China Sea. As the breeze shifted landward, the stench of copra warehouses and the reek of beached fishing *prahus* drowned the sweetness of *sampaguita* blossoms.

This blade lasts long and serves you well—
Gives slicker shaves than I can tell!
Just try the keen-edged Thin Gillette,
It saves real dough and time—you bet!
NO LOOSE TALK!
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Kane's disguise was a tradition, his weapon was nerve. He had become a sunshiner.

A *tao* in short pants and wide-brimmed hat was heading homeward, prodding a lumbering carabao. He stared at Kane, then raised his hat. *"Buenas noches, señor."*

Kane returned the greeting, though he wondered at that momentary intent look. What was wrong with the picture? He'd never before been in Iloilo. Since the native farmer does not travel much, there was no chance that this one had recognized him from the raid in Capiz, at the extreme north of the island.

"Maybe," he temporized, "I look worse than average."

Ahead was the *barrio*, a sprawl of bamboo shacks, their floors perhaps six feet from the ground. Palms, papayas, and bananas surrounded it. On the bank of a nearby stream, half a dozen tawny-skinned girls squatted, finishing the day's laundry: a garment at a time, dipped, twisted, smacked down on a flat rock, and repeat, ad infinitum, until the cloth is either clean or worn out.

The girls ceased chattering. Their laughter choked up, and they exchanged glances which, even in that deceptive light, made it clear to Kane that he interested them. This was disquieting, for he could see that they wondered what to do next, what to say next. Their greeting was a compromise, and then they bent to their work.

He could feel them watching him, but he did not look back.

Nearing the village, he heard chickens squawking, *babuis* grunting as they rooted in the refuse under the shacks. All that was natural, yet the *barrio* made him uneasy.

There was song, yet spiritless as the laughter. An old man sitting on the high veranda of his house bowed gravely. "Go with God, *señor*."

"Remain with God, *señor*."

The words were to speed a traveler on his way, a conventional phrase as formal and meaningless as the ceremonious *"Es la casa de Usted."* But now the words were uncomfortably pointed, a benediction instead of a mere courtesy.

Kane halted, still uncertain. Two men, squatting near the adjoining house, made a pretense of being preoccupied in the handling of two game-cocks, but their attention was on Kane. And when a dirty and sottish-looking Americano can distract a Filipino from his national sport, something is off the beam.

"Señor," he said to the old man, whose dignity was enhanced by silver-rimmed spectacles, "I have come down from"—gesture—"yonder. How is it in town, and thanking you for your benediction, why is it offered to me?"

"I am Hilario Puente, who kisses your hands. Be pleased not to tell me who you are. Ignorance is better. But General Kuroda has sent special orders to organize the town. Coming from yonder, you would not have a travel permit, or identification card. You will put your friends in danger."

KURODA, commanding general of the islands. Kane knew all about him. He knew also about identification cards, and had deliberately decided against having one forged. Interning a sunshiner would be the height of silly precaution when persons over sixty, or in chronic ill health, were permitted at large. Hilario Puente meant that Kane's visit would put native friends in danger.

A sunshiner had no white friends. An outcast, he finds the islander more charitable than those who had been his own people.

All this was clear, but "organizing" the town was not. So he asked, "What has happened?"

"They enforce old regulations and make new ones. Also, there are political societies. And each *presidente* is responsible, personally, for the good order of his *barrio*."

"You are the *presidente*, Don Hilario?"

"My honor and responsibility—and grief. It is still some walk to Iloilo, but I am afraid to offer you my poor house."

"Now that I understand, I could not accept it."

"It is much better in the mountains, *señor*. But if you must go to Iloilo, go with God."

An old woman, shriveled and leathery, came from the shack. She wore heavy golden earrings, a red calico dress, and red shoes—these last proving that she was an important lady. Instead of Spanish, she spoke Visayan and at a clip somewhat too fast for Kane to get. Don Hilario's face went blank, his voice remained even, yet it was apparent that he was putting up an argument.

"She says that it would be a sin to let a Christian walk on after dark. The curfew is strict, and the sentries are not as lax as they were. Do us the honor, *señor*. My wife, Doña Catalina, she insists."

"After your warning, I should go on, or go back."

The old woman said in Spanish. "You will leave early in the morning. You see, no law makes us ask you for papers. You are too tired to make disorders. Manifestly, you are not armed. All this I told my husband."

"Thank you." He dug into his sagging pocket and brought out a knotted blue bandana, which he untied. It contained placer gold he had washed during the days he had spent growing a beard and becoming a sunshiner. "Allow me to offer you some. I dug it myself."

"Oh, it's gold! But too valuable."

"Not at all. Only a souvenir."

They gave him rice and chicken, and some small fish whose pickling and spicing could not disguise their horrible stench. That Kane ate *guinamos* without a qualm convinced the old folks that he was indeed a sunshiner.

Then they spread a mat for him on the split-bamboo floor.

For a while the gloom of the village whispered and murmured; its drowsy voice put Kane to sleep.

A persistent tickling along his cheek made Kane stir and mutter. A moment passed before he realized that someone was gently brushing him with a bit of palm leaf. To awaken a man suddenly is bad; body and soul may become separated.

"*Qué pasa?*" he whispered.

"Leave at once. Soldiers," the old woman answered. "They search the *barrio*. Listen . . ."

Dogs began to yap. There was the thump of marching feet, the falsetto jangle of Japanese voices. Villagers were awakening.

"Where's Don Hilario?"

"Gone to meet them. Hurry, *señor*."

This awakened him, and thoroughly. Since banana plants screened the front of the house, he wasted no stealth going down the steps. Though the confusion of voices kept him from making sense out of anything, the rising note of alarm put him on edge.

In the darkness, he stumbled over a pig and sprawled in the dirt. Near him, a man said to a girl, "Those *cabrones*! They surround the place."

"What's the Americano done? *Madre de dios*! What will they do to us?"

A flashlight blazed. He thought he heard Don Hilario talking to a Jap. In the opposite direction, he caught the gleam of bayonets. Barging into Iloilo as a sunshiner was one thing. Being nailed as the reasonable facsimile of some badly wanted fugitive, presumably white, was something else. So, before the cordon became too tight, he had to get out.

A *BARRIO* ranges from a cluster of half a dozen scattered huts to a good sized village. It may have a single street more or less curlicue, or it may be laid off in a fair approximation of blocks. Instead of building on his farm, the *tao*, a sociable

chap, prefers to live in a settlement.

Kane ducked under a house. The *suali* matting which enclosed the six-foot spaee between earth and floor sheltered a two-wheeled *caromata* and a shaggy pony. The temperamental animal, spooky as the Bishop's Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, lashed out with a kick which had more speed than accuracy. Startled chickens fluttered out, squawking.

The Japs would be searching under each house, and they'd thoroughly paw their way through the two Chinese shops. There was time for reconnaissance, so Kane found and parted an overlap of the *suali* matting, which was lashed to the supporting stilts. Now that his eyes were accustomed to the basement blackness, he readily picked out the metallic gleam of equipment; and despite the stable odor, he caught the engine fumes. The patrol had come by truck.

Behind him—that is from the highway front of the village—the search was forming. Judging from the sounds, it was the anticipated house-to-house combing. He wondered if anyone had admitted his presence. In Moro-land, such a query would have been silly. Here, among the suburban Visayans, he could not be sure.

Bataan, splendid subject for *canciones;* but a civilian must eat, and the valor of early 1942 didn't help a farmer today. Kane could not expect these people to share his danger. The United States had failed them, and they were human. Here was reason added to that which had brought him to find Hong Li: To be convinced that MacArthur was coming back, not too late, and with enough men, was what they needed.

The Jap cordon at the rear of the village was not closing in. These men waited to challenge if anyone tried to slip out.

As soldiers went, they were good. However, they were not facing the dangers of Moro-land, where sentries have to be paired on each post so that at least one will be able to yell when hell boils out of the *cogon* grass.

He wriggled from cover, slowly, with all the guerrilla skill he had learned during those months in Mindanao; but now, instead of a leaf-shaped *barong,* he had only empty hands.

Fireflies made blue-white blobs against the blackness. Sky-glow and starlight were just sufficient to throw the trees into silhouette. The thin, dry rustle of bamboo in the breeze covered what small sound Kane made. His coat and pants, once white, were now so begrimed that they were not the betrayers they would have been, yet they handicapped him.

From bamboo to palm trunks—and now he was within smelling distance of the skibbies. "Maybe it's mutual," he told himself.

THE soldiers were too far apart for sustained chatter, but from time to time they jabbered in their jangling, inhuman speech. A few years back, in Manila, he'd heard half a dozen Jap girls plink-plonk-planking their three-stringed *samisens,* as they sang in a metallic monotone; calcimined dolls with lacquer-sleek hair and brocaded gowns. He'd never suspected how he'd come to hate that Japanese intonation. These soldiers had that same irritating half-mechanical, half-human tone.

Beyond the bayonet gleam was *cogon* grass: stalks like a man's finger, blades edged like a *kampilan.* Nasty, but one could get through.

Weariness and short rations had whipped him down; and Kane was alone, for the first time, with neither the Black Bishop, nor Ximenes, the aviator, nor any of Datu Ryan's guerrillas. He was glad that he was not armed.

His raids had played the devil with civilians many a time, but this was different, for these old folks had taken him in, and they had fed him when they should not have. He had to get through, without violence.

Kane broke out in a sweat. He had no steam, no bounce. He was afraid of making a false move. His head ached from fury and futility. He knew that he could not slip past; not this time. And the house to house search was moving toward him. Flashlight spots, reflecting from *nipa*-thatched or *suali* walls, made him patches in the gloom. While this helped him pick out the sentries more clearly, it could also help them.

Then he heard a carabao's warning note: not shrill like a squeal, nor deep enough to be called a bellow; rather, an

odd, nasal tone combining both effects, and while not especially loud, it meant danger. The bulky brute was annoyed. He disliked strangers, as did all his kind.

They hated white men. Kane didn't know how they felt about Japs, and this was no time to wait and see, for the mere scent of a white man makes a water-buffalo run amuck, chasing the foreigner to cover, if, luckily, any is near. On the other hand, a six-year-old Filipino child can lead the beasts around. Fourteen hundred pounds of wrath and muscle, a hulk built like an underslung Durham bull, and armed with crescent-shaped horns thicker at the base than a husky man's arm. He'd never forgotten his race with one, and how a *tao* had come to the rescue. Luckily, the carabao, though fast, is not as agile as he might be.

SO KANE made up his mind. He moved toward the hulking brute and the mosquito-breeding pool. The dull gleam of the water was broken by his huge dark bulk, a faint luster of horns and the momentary glint of wicked little eyes. These went red as a stray reflection from the flashlights picked him out.

Kane crawled closer. The wrathful sound became sharper. Then came a mighty splashing. The carabao lurched forward, splashing mud and water. Whether he had good night vision or only a keen sense of smell did not make any difference. Jim Kane was getting an apprenticeship in bull-ring tactics. Sticks and brush crashed.

The wrathful bellow attracted the cordon of soldiers. They bunched up from both directions. While they should not have quit their posts, they could not be blamed, for something was happening and they reasonably figured that it concerned them.

It did, though not in the sense that they had anticipated. Given just a few more seconds, they'd have at least part of the answer, yet during that brief interval, Kane had the advantage. Guerrilla-wise, he had the necessary jump on them, that short lead which gives a creeping Moro a chance to *kris* a rifle-armed man.

They yelled in their apish jabber. Kane, now racing as fast as he could stretch his legs, no longer depended on concealment. A man alone and running—fatal. But a man and a crashing, bellowing hulk, they became a unit of something which the skibby could not at once resolve.

An old woman, shriveled and leathery, came from the shack.

For an instant, Kane wondered whether bayonets wouldn't be preferable to carabao horns. His legs were wooden. Behind him, villagers yelled. The search party was confused. Kane flung himself to one side, crashing into a bamboo clump. The carabao, moving under full power, could not swerve.

It was not clear whether the smell of Jap now goaded him as the scent of sunshiner had an instant previous, or whether, just plain irritated, he did not particularly care what he tossed and trampled. He kept on. The Japs scattered more rapidly than they had bunched up. Several fired wildly.

Kane bolted for the *cogon* grass. The crashing and bellowing masked the sound he made, just as the confusion caused by

the charge shattered every semblance of watchfulness.

Then, wheeling, the brute returned, trotting, grumbling sullenly. Villagers, horrified at how the soldiers would take such a reception, dashed forward to quiet the carabao before he hurt someone. The darkness was alive with white-clad figures.

Kane headed for Iloilo; and whoever the fugitive internee or war prisoner might be, he wished him luck.

Now that Kane was safe, for the moment, he derived a queer satisfaction out of having faced the kick-back of some unknown rebel's move against the invaders. In a way, he was sharing an experience which his own activities had so often inflicted on native civilians; and while he still kept his growing doubts as to the merit of guerrilla raids, he had shed a little of his acute self-reproach.

CHAPTER III

HATCHET MAN

ONCE the *barrio* was well behind him, Kane worked back toward Highway Number One. If picked up at night, it would be better to be caught stumbling along in the open.

Finally, reaching the city's outskirts, he made for the beach, where the slim hulls of *prahus* were black against the sand. These offered concealment. Further along the shore were the commercial fishing craft, motor-driven, and largely Japanese-owned. Such outfits, costing around 15,000 *pesos,* were quite beyond all but a very few Filipino fishermen.

This was far enough, since the large-scale commercial equipment would be guarded. So Kane crawled under an inverted *prahu* and burrowed into the sand.

At dawn, he emerged for the big gamble: barging along until he found Hong Li, or ran afoul of the police. But now, less than ever, did he look worth the picking.

Business as usual. Carabao carts loaded with truck garden produce creaked along. Slim, brown girls balanced shallow baskets on their sleek heads. Each had her cargo of bananas, pale green yet fully ripe; green-skinned oranges; greenish-yellow mangoes; and that peculiar fruit which Kane always called "misbegotten apples"—reddish purple, with the soft fuzz of a peach and cream-white flesh, somewhat mealy, lacking the apple's tartness.

Market booths were ready for business; each *tendera,* squatting under her awning, made last minute changes in the display of goods. There were fish just caught and fish kept alive in tanks, wicker cages of fowl. Meat, freshly butchered, swarmed with flies.

The sight warmed him. He had missed the city markets more than he had realized. Here were a people more amiable and gay than the rugged inland Moro. The men laughed and the women let their glances rove, and they smiled from the corners of the eyes.

There were no cars. The army had seized them.

Cyclists wheeled down the street, and a few *caromatas,* drawn by ponies like the Bishop's Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, rattled along.

At the Bank of Tokyo, all halted. Riders, drivers and passengers alike were alighting.

A sentry walked post, a bow-legged, buck-toothed, near-sighted runt whose campaign badges indicated that he had been places. Since this bit of human offal represented the majesty of the Empire, each passerby had to halt and bow.

A white-haired native, a frail, little man whose eyes must have been failing, passed the deadline. Someone hissed at him. He turned, blinking and bewildered. Then he understood the gestures, but he was a bit too late. *Bushido,* the Japanese code of nobility and honor, was behind the rifle butt which caught him under the chin and knocked him from his feet. Then a brisk kick in the stomach, and, having been reprimanded, he was left to pick himself up, when and if possible.

The Jap resumed his brisk pacing. Nothing personal intended. He had merely done the proper thing, for the Mikado, who wrote a three-line poem once a year on *Twilight in Spring,* or *Serene Thoughts,* or *Beatific Peace,* had been insulted when a *Gugu* failed to render suitable thanks for Imperial Protection.

Kane had no silly notions about registering resentment. Stumbling foggily along, he came to an uncertain halt and

Kane risked a gesture which stood a fifty-fifty chance. It would either help him or it would get him in a jam. . . .

made his bow. Sixty degrees for women, forty-five for men.

His geometry must have been correct. The sentry did not boot him, nor halt him to demand an identification card.

Two middle-aged American planters, strolling along, swerved to give Kane plenty of clearance. "Damn sunshiner!" one muttered. "Too lousy to intern."

From time to time, Kane halted to bow to the soldiers who strolled along, off duty. White women, going to market with their children, seemed at ease and unworried. One Jap private, chatting with a storekeeper, grinned and gestured at a little blond girl, who regarded him without the least alarm.

"Mommie, that's a nice Jap, isn't it?"

Mommie bowed and made a noncommittal answer. Now that the shooting was over, the invaders seemed to like kids.

Kane, a stranger in Iloilo, moved by hunch until he ferreted out the Chinese

quarter. The vague scent of sandalwood, and punk sticks burned in joss houses, the lingering fumes of peanut-oil lamps and opium, became stronger. Doubtless the inhabitants had been cuffed about, but now they seemed placid enough as they shuffled about in their flopping pants and blue jackets.

KANE addressed a shriveled old fellow who sat in the doorway of a shop. Not caring to risk Moro, the only native dialect he spoke fluently, he tried Spanish. "*Señor,* can you tell me where Hong Li's store is?"

The beady little eyes went blank; polite, inscrutable, unwavering in a motionless mask. "I am sorry, sir, I do not know him. Possibly around the corner."

This was just too pat. Every Chinese knows every other Chinese in the quarter.

Kane could have carried on until he found the store, assuming it had not been wrecked or seized. However, there was the time element. Hong Li was the only man in Iloilo with whom he could talk, man to man, and he had to talk to someone, soon. That search party of the previous night suggested general trouble for strangers. But for the fact that Iloilo's 50,000 inhabitants included a reasonable number of white scum, sunshiners and drifters, he'd have been nabbed by the first sentry.

Kane risked a gesture which stood a fifty-fifty chance of helping. The other chance was that it would get him into a jam. He raised his hands in the manner made famous by German soldiers in the previous war, but he did not say *Kamerad.* Simultaneously, he bent his knees, and then drew his hands down, quickly, yet with a pause for each of the three jerking motions which broke the descent.

Hong Li had not taught him the "sign of fire." It really was not secret. Every anthropologist encounters it, in one form or another, among primitive as well as civilized races.

The slitted black eyes became alive, biting, intense. He was interested, yet dubious. A Chinaman is always dubious for a while, for his people have learned a lot, in the past thousand years, about the care and feeding of invaders. Every stranger is a potential trouble-maker.

He made a gesture. It was very quick, and Kane could not possibly have described it, much less imitated it. All Kane could do was to look blank. He knew that he should have answered with sign or word, and he was caught short. Seconds dragged.

The shriveled little man finally said, "Come in."

He neither approved nor disapproved.

Kane followed. The old man spoke to a slender girl in black silk. She was the color of aged ivory, and she wore jade pendants in her ears; exquisite, but as remote and impersonal as the teak image of Kwan Yin who smiled inscrutably from a little shrine. Seeing the Goddess of Mercy was a good omen to Kane, who needed one.

The girl moved forward to take charge of the *tienda.*

The old man parted blue curtains, and led the way into a dark cubicle. There he gestured, and Kane seated himself on a matting-covered bench. At last the man spoke. "Why did you make that sign?"

"The 'sign of fire?' I am in distress, *señor.*"

"Tigers eat men in the western mountains, and tigers eat men in the eastern mountains."

"Hong Li is in trouble?"

"Hong Li is really away." The old man smiled. "For his health. This person is Yung Tsu. Be pleased to wait until the Honorable Hong's kinfolk learn that you are here."

Hands clasped in his flowing sleeves, Yung Tsu bowed three times. Kane returned the bows and felt awkward about it all. Chinese etiquette was even trickier than Spanish. Hong Li, strictly modern and slangy, always had a horse-laugh for "this Confucius stuff."

Presently, the ivory-colored girl came in with a pot of tea and some wafers. She did not speak. She acted as though he did not exist at all, and yet she made it clear that the refreshment was for him and not for Yung Tsu. Her seeming blankness actually was a finely controlled reserve. As he sipped his tea, he could picture a list of prescribed expressions. *Probably starting with benevolent hostility and working toward watchful neu-*

trality, which I'm getting, he thought.

Yung Tsu had not asked Kane's name. Nor his age. Nor his wealth. Nor as to his health. That is, Kane did not yet really exist for him as a human being. So, sustaining the old man's fiction, the girl served tea as though to an empty space.

He listened to the voice and clamor of the town. The blare of a horn and the roar of an engine startled him. Someone military in a hurry.

The girl came back. She smoothed out the straw matting of the *k'ang* and set out a small, hard pillow. She laid down a newspaper and a pack of cigarettes and some matches. Then the silken shadow glided to the front again.

Kane, mortally tired, ruffled through the paper. It screamed with Japanese victories, New Order, Peace, Prosperity, and Protection; the Elder Brother urged the Younger Brother to cooperate and cease vain resistance. There was a full-page advertising blurb extolling Kalabapi, the political society, "introduction to independence, an apprenticeship in correct political thought."

N. B.—Summary execution for belonging to unauthorized political societies.

This footnote was in Spanish and in Visayan. Finally, there was an application blank. Kane had an insane urge to fill it out and mail it. He pictured some puzzled Jap official thumbing a rule book, seeking a precedent.

Then he stretched out on the straw matting. For the first time in many days, he slept and with a feeling of security.

IT WAS dark when he was aroused by a faint *scratch-scratch*. He sat up. Yung Tsu had returned. Two men stood behind him, their attitude respectful. "Hong Tien, Hong Kua," he announced. "Representing absent kinsman. You may go with them."

The Hongs were young and pie-faced and hard-eyed. They wore their hats in the house. It was grotesque, their old-fashioned gesture of keeping the hands concealed in the sleeves of their white drill coats. Thir gaudy neckties and their pearl stickpins added to the incongruity. However, there was nothing funny about the Hongs, not even when the first-named said, "Buddy, you look all in! Let's go." Then, bowing L-shaped, he sing-songed compliments to the old man, and backed from the little room, followed by Hong Kua.

Once respectfully removed from Yung Tsu's presence, the Hong boys let their hands out of their sleeves, hitched up their pants, and went modern.

"He likes that stuff. Nice fellow," Hong Tien explained.

"It's a wonder you weren't picked up," Hong Kua remarked, as they stepped into an alley perhaps a yard wide. "Or maybe you didn't ask for Li."

"Except here," Kane answered.

"Damn lucky. Li is hot as a firecracker."

"You gentlemen speak remarkably good English."

"We aren't gentlemen. We're hatchetmen." Hong Tien broadcasting now. They took turns, it seemed.

"From San Francisco?"

"We get around. You're a hatchet man yourself."

"How do you know?"

"When Colonel Higashi had you in jail up in Capiz, one of the Hong clan saw you. He told us when he came to town, and Li said, 'Damn, that must be the Kane I know! He gets around, doesn't he?' "

They paused in the darkness while someone fumbled for a bolt. Metal whispered, air scented with joss sticks billowed out. One of the Hongs chuckled and said, "Life is funny. You know something? You've picked the toughest town on the island. Iloilo is all in line for a toughening-up. You blowing up that distillery in Capiz started things, and there's been some—um—agitating around here."

"Yeah, life is funny," Kane observed glumly. "Some people have trouble dumped on them, and some go out looking for it."

Kane told the Hong boys why he had come to town. They liked his idea. However, there were certain obstacles. First, they knew nothing about radio. Second, much of Hong Li's stock had been taken over by the Japs when they captured Iloilo.

"It is like this," Hong Kua explained. "The air stinks with propaganda. But the

skibbies can't jam the air all the time, and so they are fussy about who has a radio."

"A lot of Filipinos are cooperating?"

Hong Tien nodded. "What can they do? It's a German system. The *Gauleiter* business."

"You mean, instead of a car in every garage, it's a spy in every home, and each *presidente* is responsible for his people, and he and the *alcalde* and the schoolteachers and the like are sort of hostages at large, so they've got to keep people thinking right, or—"

"Or acting right and pretending to think right," Hong Kua cut in. "You got a sample last night. If they'd caught you there, Don Hilario would have smelled hell."

"What was it all about, that search? They didn't know I was coming to town. They couldn't have."

The Hongs pondered, eyed each other. "One of the power company men, an American fellow by the name of Smith, flung a piece of pipe across a high-tension bus bar and ran like hell during the blackout he'd started. A lot of power and utility people figure they might as well work; if they don't, the Japs can take over and do a fair job after a few mistakes and bunglings. They get cards of identity and official arm bands, the sentries don't boot them around, they get breaks of one kind and another, and so do their families.

"Just like cooperating Filipinos get more chow. Just like you said, a patriot with an empty belly don't last long. It's that way in town. The *taos* raise their own grub; it's different out in the *bondoks*."

"So they are looking for Smith, and anyone giving him a hideout is liable to face a firing squad?"

"That's right."

"Mmmm . . . what are the Chinese doing?"

The Hongs answered in well-drilled chorus, "You wouldn't be interested. But we are for you."

"If anything happens to me, can I count on you to sell Hong Li the idea of getting a radio hook-up at Datu Ryan's guerrilla headquarters near Mt. Apo?"

"You can count on us to talk it up. Now you stay put. While they're looking for Smith, it's bad for you to prowl. Make yourself at home, and if you see or hear something you might get curious about, just don't get curious—it's better not to. We'll be seeing you."

They filed out. Bolts and locks clicked. It looked a lot like protective custody to Kane.

FROM the following morning's paper, which was brought in during his sleep, he learned more about Don Hilario. The old man was in the city jail, awaiting investigation by the military authorities. He had been harboring a fugitive who, in spite of having eluded the Japanese cordon, would be captured within a matter of hours. The description of Kane, though on the sketchy side, was uncomfortably accurate.

The system was working: One of Don Hilario's own people had betrayed him, either to curry favor or to win protection.

"I put him on the spot."

Kane spoke the words aloud. Though his own utterance shocked him, he felt better for having pronounced the charge. Here was an issue which he could not evade. A fact was a fact. He had deliberately blocked mental squirmings, tricks of logic, or retreat. Having spoken, he could not pass the buck to the public utilities man who decided to take to the hills after having done what damage he could.

Made in Japan, made in Germany: a routine for utilizing normal human weakness to force honest and kindly people to betray each other. Nor did Kane find any refuge in damning the traitor, since that man himself might have been under pressure.

For the first time, Kane began to realize fully how he and his guerrillas had hurt their own people almost as much as they had hurt the enemy. The Japs were logical enough in their contention that a guerrilla can operate only with the personal consent and the assistance of the civilian population.

Here he had it, face to face: Since guerrillas coud not expel or annihilate the invaders, since at the best they would settle no more than a dozen or a hundred Japs at a raid, since they often contented them-

selves with knifing an isolated sentry or bushwhacking an outpost squad, would it not be better to disband until the army and navy returned for an island to island mopping up?

While the delegation which had come to Datu Ryan's camp had made an impression on Kane, this was worse, for he had eaten Don Hilario's food and slept in his house. His present safety made him acutely miserable. If he had been nailed, that night, he'd have said, "Well, we are in the same boat."

Now Don Hilario was alone, facing the kickback of a kindly act. Worse, there was the bitterness of betrayal by a fellow villager, perhaps by a kinsman. Kane finally ceased pacing up and down the dusky room. He put on the clothes which the Hongs had had laundered while he slept.

Then he tried a door. It was locked. He tried the other. The latch yielded. Someone had slipped.

The thought of his mission checked him only for a moment. Rummaging in the cabinet in the corner, he found paper and a pencil. He wrote:

> Hong Li: You don't need me to tell you how to carry on. I don't have to guide you, and since I can't help you, my job is to help Don Hilario.

The only thing to do was to report to the Japs and prove that Hilario Puente had not actually helped anyone but a groggy sunshiner, and that was his intention when he started down the stairs to the courtyard. The gold dust in his pocket would make his story plausible.

Darkness had fallen. He could barely distinguish the arched exit which led to street or alley, or perhaps another court or a passage which wound through an entire block.

The courtyard gate was locked. In the gloom, he stumbled over a wooden bench. This he turned upside down, bracing the end of the plank against the edge of a flagstone which jutted above its neighbors. He inched himself up the inclined plane. It was tricky work. Finally, however, he reached the bench legs. Then, clawing the masonry, he got a finger hold. Bit by bit, he contrived to straighten his legs. Balanced on his uncertain footing, he could just grip the top of the wall.

A leap would knock the support from under him. The overhead hold was far too skimpy. He stretched, flexed himself from the waist, wriggled his arms from the shoulders, and gained perhaps an inch. There was a chance, just a bare chance, that he could now chin himself.

He rested for a moment, and relaxed. Now a swift stretch, so timed that he gained a light impulsion from his footing and simultaneously, all the arm and body

stretch he had. He made it. Then the lift. Pulling oneself belly-up against a wall was different from chinning. He got a toe-hold in a crevice. That was all that saved him.

Below, a door opened. "Hey, where you going?"

Kane heaved. He was making it. But hands closed about his ankles. His fingers tore loose from their hold, and he toppled over, twisting.

Instead of the bone-smashing crash which he expected, upreaching arms broke his drop. He was jarred, but not hurt. The Hong boys were hoisting him to his feet.

"If you have to be a damn fool, we can tie you."

Shaking off the Hongs was as useless as it was impossible, so he did not try. Once they had him in the upstairs room, Hong Tien cut into the queries by snatching the note Kane had left.

"Good principles, lousy judgment," was the verdict. "Surrender won't help Don Hilario a bit."

Kane explained why he believed that it would.

"Look here," Hong Tien objected, "Smith is the guy to blame. If he hadn't blown his top, the skibbies wouldn't have searched the *barrio*, and the *presidente* wouldn't be in a jam."

"I know, I know," Kane said, wearily. "But if I hadn't fairly dropped at Don Hilario's front door, the skibbies could have searched the place and they'd've found nothing—and also, no one would have spilled any beans."

Then a new voice cut in. "Excuse me, but Americans are damn fools. First they sit around doing nothing when they ought to be doing plenty, and then they go wild trying to do something, just anything, when they ought to sit still."

Kane groaned. "Another Hong heard from! Hello, Li."

The difference between Li and the others was that he was not pie-faced. Thin, button-nosed, alert as a veteran tom-cat about to enter a strange alley; shrewd eyes, and a smile which completely exploded the dead-pan oriental theory.

"Hi, Jim!" He pounced, rather than strode to offer his hand; a slim, dainty-looking hand, small even for an Asiatic's, but the fingers sank into Kane's big paw as though actuated by powerful levers. "Lucky I got back before you pulled a dumb trick."

"Where the hell have you been?" Already, Kane's worries were thinning. "They had me wondering and jittery."

Li's smile was studiedly vague. He half turned, took a shingling hatchet from under his armpit, and observed, "George Washington made 'em famous."

The stains on the steel suggested that Li had neither been shingling nor reducing cherry trees to a decent altitude.

"I was adjusting a radio set."

Kane squinted at the blade. Bits of straight, bristly, black hair. . . . "Well, speaking of radios, I came over from Mindanao to buy one."

Kua and Tien filed out, silently. Li said, "I guess it gets monotonous in the Moro country. Well, well, so you don't hate the Islands any more! Jim, you've changed since you checked out of Zamboanga. I heard you were married. Congratulations."

So Kane told him all about it. Judging from the looks of the hatchet, he'd made a long trip to see a man who had lost all touch with radio. But it was good to talk to Li again.

CHAPTER IV

A SUNSHINER SURRENDERS

WHAT made Kane's dangerous trip pay its first dividend was when Li finally said, "Your idea isn't dizzy. Almost any receiving set, unless it's carefully shielded, becomes a low-powered transmitter."

"I thought that went out with the old regenerative hookup."

Li shook his head. "The howling and the interference were taken care of, but the effect is there. That's why they finally woke up and made the crews of tankers dump their radios. An engraved invitation to U-boats. So by playing around with enough receiver parts, I could make a transmitter."

"Reach Australia from Mt. Apo?"

"Mmm. . . . Money back if you're not delighted, though maybe you won't be. But it takes much less power to send

dit-da-dit than it does audio-frequency, for this reason—"

"Skip the reasons, chum. Just produce. We've wrecked some Jap trucks. The metal comes in handy, we've got a number of batteries, and there's an undamaged engine that could do the charging with its generator. Is your store completely *bagsak?*"

Lin nodded. "But I hid a lot of stuff just for spite."

"Can do?"

"Can do."

"O.K., but will you?"

"Hell, Jim, why wouldn't I?"

Kane jerked a thumb at the hatchet. "I don't know what you're up to. It looks like an old-fashioned tong-war."

Li shook his head. "Chinese secret societies have quit quarreling. Anyway, the stuff you remember from Frisco's wild and woolly days was the lawless element, nothing more than Chinese gangsters. The new so-called 'hatchet man' is working for fun, not money. Like you, up Capiz way."

"Speaking of Capiz, is there an identification of me?"

"The only way I knew it was you was putting two and two. Then there were rumors coming from Mindanao, the Davao side, and it all added up. You feel pretty low about Don Hilario?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Do we have to tie you till I get the radio parts collected here and there, or will you use your head?"

Kane glanced at the hatchet. "How about you? Are you going to quit making service calls?"

Li made a wry grimace. "There are sets all over, and they only get Tokyo programs. They need adjustment."

"And if something slips, this place will be raided."

"That's why I'm usually out."

"Mmmm. . . . If I were picked up, or picked off, between here and the Apo district—the chunk that's marked 'unexplored'—can I count on you to carry on?"

Li gave him a curious look. "When a man gets a notion, there is no stopping him. The one who dropped you on the coast isn't waiting, is he?"

"No. If I found you, a boat back would be easy. If I didn't find you, I could still get a boat. Having a Moro hanging around for Lord knows how many days might cause trouble. Say, what's this sign mean?"

"Excuse me, but Americans are damn fools," a new voice cut in.

He started to demonstrate, but Li cut in, "The one you pulled on Yung Tsu? You sure you don't know any others?"

"Positively. I read about that one. Work on anthropology."

"O.K. I just wanted to say, if you've stumbled across anything, watch your step."

"Tong stuff?"

"Deeper than that. You fumble around at the wrong time and place, someone thinks you belong and finds out you don't, later, well—it's very bad. Maybe you've heard of the Society of Heaven and Earth? It's been talked about a lot, since 1926, in Singapore."

Kane nodded. "So that's it? Chinese Masonry?"

"Let's skip it. But this won't hurt your fact collection: There was once a secret society organized, or re-organized maybe, to run the Manchus out of China, several hundred years back. Well, the Manchus aren't running China any more."

"And the Japs are worse than the Manchus?"

Li didn't answer, but Kane began to understand a little more about those service calls made with a hatchet: The Society of Heaven and Earth was once more working against an enemy of China. After a moment, Li went on, "Don't be a fool, sit

tight. I've got to get out of here, for reasons. One of them, to get tubes and wire and stuff."

He went out through the concealed door which had admitted him. And on his way, he picked up his hatchet. All in all, Kane was convinced that he had more than a man working with him; he had a tradition, and ancient Chinese patience beneath whose surface a Chinese grudge was simmering.

THAT dark, small room became Kane's world. Sometimes the Hongs brought his food when he was awake, but generally it was while he slept. And now that he had relaxed, he began to realize how close to the edge of exhaustion he had been.

The papers had made no mention of Saboteur Smith, which indicated that the power house employee must still be under cover. But Don Hilario cropped up, dis-

Kane missed the split-second chance for which he had so unreasonably played. He didn't feel the pavement or have time to wonder when the bayonet would pin him to the cobbles as he went down.

mayingly, a few days after the Hongs had talked Kane into common sense. The *presidente* was to face a firing squad for obstructing the New Order and for harboring a fugitive.

The Hongs, thinking that they had put Kane on an even keel, had failed to censor the paper which they brought their guest each day. And this time, they were not present to stop him when he left.

Let the Japs intern him. He could take whatever other civilians faced. He reasoned, moreover, as he went down the dark alley which led to a street nearly as gloomy, that his surrender in behalf of an innocent Filipino would do more for morale than any number of service calls with a hatchet.

He had read, many a time, yarns about criminals surrendering to save a person wrongfully condemned, a hackneyed routine, and unconvincing all around. Yet this seemed different, and not at all a movie gag. Though not as hopelessly bedraggled and worn out as he had been on approaching Iloilo, he still looked the sunshiner, and that he lacked a gin bouquet was not necessarily a false note. The most persistent drunk runs out of munitions at times.

He was not as steady on his legs as he expected. Despite square meals and quinine and rest, he was shaky. Malaria was tricky stuff; even Datu Ryan, hardbitten and acclimated, had his bad days. It played hell with the natives, it harassed the Japs. Many of those cut down in Mindanao must have been carrying on solely on nerve and the Mikado-cult.

Kane's goal was civilian police headquarters. Filipino cops patroled the city, under Jap supervision, just as native judges handled routine cases. The aim of the invaders was to get the natives used to seeing things function pretty much, as to daily details, in the way they had before Pearl Harbor, and meanwhile, sell them alleged "liberation." A good many Filipino prisoners of war had been released on parole.

And the radio, the carefully controlled press, with their day-after-day damning of Americans as foreign tyrants; the Elder Brother to Young Brother business; the Junior Kalibapi, a cross between Boy Scouts and the German "Hitler's Youth Movement," were bound to have their effect. A jungle Moro can nurse murder and revolt in his heart until his memory fails from old age, but these suburban and city people, though no less courageous, had been geared to different standards.

"Turning in," Kane told himself, to keep up his courage, "packs more weight than a guerrilla raid. Hell, I'll get my chance to sneak out, I'm just a sunshiner, the *Gugu* cops'll get an eyeful—"

Then he heard the yell, turned, and saw a soldier bound out of a doorway, rifle swinging to butt-strike.

"Bow!" the skibbie snarled. "American son of a ———!"

Absorbed in his surrender to Filipino cops, he had barged into a real formation. He twisted, tried to evade the butt which was swooping for his stomach. It caught his lower ribs on one side, a brutal wallop, but not enough to lay him out, nor sufficient to paralyze him, since the impact was glancing. And then Kane's none too steady wits became scrambled. The pain, the Japanese face, the glint of steel, all caused a short circuit, so that instinct took command of purpose.

He socked the skibbie as he got inside the man's swing. He grappled for the rifle. With his usual bounce and coordination, he'd have torn the Jap in half, but Kane was far from being himself. He missed the split-second chance for which he had so unreasonably played, and he got what anyone could have expected: a knee to the stomach, and the enemy was not playing.

They have rotten teeth, bowlegs, bad eyes; they've lived on offal for centuries, weeds and sea slugs and the like, and very little of those, yet the monkey man has punch and steam. This one had plenty to spare. Kane blacked out.

He did not even have time to wonder when the bayonet would pin him to the cobblestones. Socking a sentry is, by remote control, displaying contempt for the Son of the Sun Goddess, who must have been a loose wench with vile tastes.

For a while he thought he was swimming. At last he realized that it was buckets of water and not waves which splashed into his face, and that instead of the sun,

The Jap officer rose to his feet. "We are Erder Brother to Firipino. We come to riberate. Executions onry when required."

overhead lights glared into his eyes. A Jap captain and several soldiers formed a half circle about him. As he sat up, one of the latter yanked him to his feet.

"Name?" the officer demanded. "Where is identification card required by raw?"

"I been drunk," he stuttered. "Came down—from mountains."

"When?"

The Jap's eyes were pin-points behind thick lenses. He had a better face than the average of his kind. Instead of something flattened out of shape, like four pounds of jaundiced liver, he had a perceptible nose, an angular face. The myopic squint made his forehead pucker and gave him an exaggerated intentness. Aside from saying *r* for *l*, he spoke English well.

Kane tried to think. He had started out for some purpose, something to do with Filipinos, and here he was in a Jap orderly room. Voices jangling in the building convinced him he had reached military headquarters. A typewriter *tick-tacked*, each impact making his nerves jitter. He said, dully, "I don't know. I been drunk."

"Do not smerr rikor."

Kane grinned stupidly. "That is why I was able to walk."

"No time for jesters!" the captain snapped.

"Sir, it is not funny to run out of liquor. It gives you the shakes. The jerks."

The tremor of his hand, the twitch of his cheek muscles, made that convincing. Actually the after-effects of the mauling and kicking, his unsteadiness did also resemble that caused by a gin shortage.

"Why hit soldier?"

"He yelled at me. I had the shakes."

"Why come to town?"

That stumped Kane. He had one purpose which he did not care to discuss with the Japs, but there had also been another. He scratched his head. "Hit me some more, I don't know."

"Think."

The captain was stern, but not unreasonable. This was not unusual. A surprising percentage of skibbie officers had ways which would enable them to pass as reasonable facsimiles of human beings almost anywhere; the enlisted men were, generally speaking, the thorough-going stinkers, perhaps a reaction against a rigid discipline, perhaps because they'd been the under-dog at home.

"Sit down," the captain commanded.

He began to get it. That he had not been bayoneted had been due to the fact that the Japs wanted information. They were keenly interested in wandering white men. Finally it came to him. "Too hungry in the hills. Too much fever. I came down to work. If I can eat."

"Why stay so rong in the junger?"

"Scared."

The officer snorted contemptuously. Not even to deceive an enemy could he imagine a man admitting fear. And that was why, now that Kane's wits were assembling, he had made that admission. The more he was despised, the better.

"What name?"

"Jones."

"Jones, no one is frighten who obey New Order. What work?"

"Civil engineer."

Kane, terror of Mindanao, was tagged as "cadastral surveyor"; "Jones", ex-civil

engineer and practicing sot, could stand a good deal of questioning on what actually had been his training.

Then it came to him. "Captain, I remember. I can prove where I came from. I stopped in Rosarito Barrio, the *presidente* gave me food, I was too hungry to walk. The people elsewhere were afraid of me, I looked bad."

The Jap's brows rose, the eyes sharpened. "Rosarito? What *presidente?*"

Kane was on the beam. "Hilario Puente, an old man with silver-rimmed glasses. His house has *suali* walls, with patterns like this—" He waggled his finger to indicate the saw teeth and diamonds.

"Not proof."

"Soldiers came, I ran out the back, a carabao chased me."

"Not proof. Hearsay. Who tord you? Where you stay arr time since then?"

"Sleeping. Drunk. Don't remember."

He would undoubtedly have received memory aids, but for his appearance. He looked too rum-dumb to be holding out.

The captain's demand for proof was ominous. Worse, he went to his desk, pushed a buzzer, then picked up a phone while waiting for an orderly to appear. The resulting jabber of Japanese suggested an important query. The orderly saluted and hurried out, taking a memo which the captain had written.

"Let Hilario Puente identify me," Kane suggested.

"Ha! Puente identifies anyone. Puente is to be shot for harboring saboteur fugitive. You prove you were at his house, you are not a saboteur, perhaps it is not necessary to execute Puente."

"What's another Filipino to you?"

The query brought the officer to his feet. He raised his hand, drew it back, spoke to a soldier. The enlisted man slapped Kane, one-two-three. Then the captain said, "Insorence prohibited! But for your information, we are Erder Brother to Firipino. We come to riberate. Executions onry when required."

This checked pretty much with gossip which had reached guerrilla headquarters. If the Japs had been carrying on a routine of universal and brutal oppression, there would have been no delegation of villagers to ask Datu Ryan to go easy.

But how prove that he, Kane, had fled from Rosarito Barrio, and not Smith?

Then Kane got it: He reached into his pocket, and he found the bit of knotted cloth. "Look!" He untied the scrap. "No charity, I pay my way. Gold dust. I gave Don Hilario's wife some bits as a present."

The captain fingered his chin. He nodded slowly, several times. Then he gave an order, and the soldiers hustled Kane out to the old Spanish jail.

[*End of Part I*]

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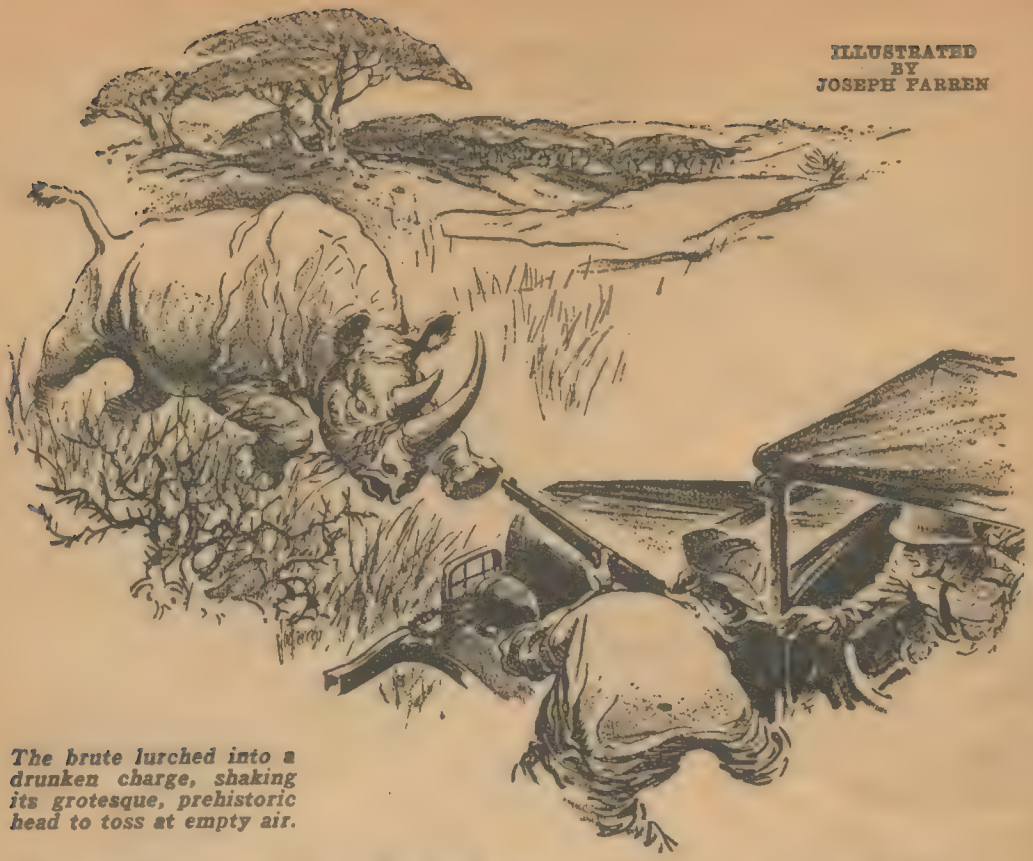


The brute lurched into a drunken charge, shaking its grotesque, prehistoric head to toss at empty air.

AT LONG RANGE

By

GORDON MacCREAGH

THE civilian was unarmed. He wore blue coveralls. In a war area, he had no snappy uniform to designate an official authority to shoot at other men—or at anything. He was only the driver of the command car. He was a civilian because he was an "essential employee" of an aircraft company in Africa and he had been told off as driver because he knew the road where there was no road, between two of the far-apart mushroom airdromes where American planes, hurrying to the North African bases, had to come down for gas and service.

Now the car was hopelessly stalled in a wilderness of stiff bunch grass and acacia scrub. It was stalled because the gasoline tank was empty: Somebody who knew things which were supposed to be secret had shown some unsuspected black boy, who knew nothing, how to loosen the nut in the fifty-gallon spare gas drum. That kind of thing happened much too often in occupied enemy territory. An "accident" is always bad enough in the middle of African nowhere. This one was particularly bad just now because a big brute of a rhinoceros that weighed nearly as much as the car—as short-sighted as any pig, but with the compensating nose of a bird dog—was deliberately quartering the ground down-wind, trying to locate the

source of the infuriating scent of man.

The officers in the car didn't like to be told things by a mere civilian. But this one was telling them, with a priestly unction in his voice and a sardonic twist on a face as hard and burned as an acacia knot. He was telling them rules of conduct that even people of their high caste, who made the rules for all of Africa, would have to obey.

"You can't stop a rhino head on by blazing loose and wild at him with a 30.06—not with the new light load."

The captain said, "But, good God! That brute is going to charge, isn't it?"

The civilian agreed heartily. "You bet. Soon as he's sure he's on the beam, he'll come straight outa hell." And he added critically, "That'n will weigh close to two ton, as I figure him."

The captain, entirely out of his familiar element, sent a hurried look around the shelterless expanse of rolling plain. He breathed "Good God!" again. "So what do we do now?"

THE big brute was trotting on short, oblique dashes across the hot scent on a vagrant wind. You could hear, almost feel, the reverberation of its feet on the sun-baked ground, coming nearer with each little questing rush. Two tons of destructive energy, as implacable and as stupid as some of those enemy platoons.

The civilian said, still critically, "They usually charge down blind, and if they miss everything they keep on going. But when an experienced old devil like this'n hunts you down, he's going to get that two-foot horn of his into something." And helpfully he added, "Of course, we could scatter like quail in the long grass. We'd have as good a chance as quail under a bird dog."

Again the captain called on God. He was in charge of the outfit and the rules of his caste made him responsible. "But there's fifty thousand dollars worth of irreplaceable radio equipment in the car! Quite irreplaceable! And it's *got* to get to Mtawa Camp by tonight." A futile rage at the all-too-prevalent sabotage overshadowed the more immediate danger. "How in hell do they find out these things?"

With a desperate and determined expression, the lieutenant was making sure that his rifle magazine was full. Sabotage wasn't the civilian's headache. He said to the lieutenant, "You'll only make him madder and show him where we are. If you can't abandon the car, there's only one chance left—and that's to hold your ground till he charges in to about thirty feet. Then he'll lower his head for the toss, and your mark is right over the tip of his horn. The brain shot. Sure and sudden."

The other lieutenant whispered on an indrawn breath, "Sure?"

The captain knew more about men than about African fauna. He cut in angrily, "See here, you! You're taking this too damned coolly. There's some other out, something else we can do?"

The civilian remained exasperatingly cool. "Ye-eh," he said softly. "There's just one other thing—*if* you can do it. If you can hit the tip of his horn, it'll jar him groggy—just like one on a tough guy's button—and he'll likely stagger off in any direction." He looked from one to the other of the officers.

The rhino broke the blank silence by suddenly squealing like an angry pig. It stood with its great hairy ears twitched forward, close enough for the men to see its little watery eyes blinking at the mass of the car, its prehensile nostrils flared out to the wind.

The civilian suddenly dropped his sport of officer-baiting. His sardonic eyes hardened to alertness, his voice to urgent authority.

"Give me it!"

Without ceremony he snatched the rifle from the first lieutenant, aimed quickly and fired.

The whole bulk of the rhino staggered. Its front feet lifted from the ground to slew the body halfway around. It came down loose at the knees. The brute lurched into a drunken charge; it hurtled past the car like a derailed engine on a wavering course, shaking its grotesque, prehistoric head to toss at empty air. You could see great gray ticks clinging in the folds of its hide. The crackle and split of stunted acacia growth came back long after its aborted charge was lost to view.

The captain let go a long breath. He

said, "If you could do that, why didn't you wait for that sure brain shot?"

The civilian answered him soberly, "Nobody can just 'do' that. That one was luck." And he suddenly showed an unexpected inside to his hard exterior. "Besides, its damn poor sport to smash a poor dumb beast on a sure thing. With modern weapons, if you don't get buck fever, they haven't a chance to get back at you."

The captain grunted, "Hmph!" and after a while, "Hmph!" again. "I think you will be hearing more about this."

THE civilian did hear more—from another captain. This captain said, "Mr. 'Tembo' Neale—we have been making some enquiries about you. We find that you've been over a lot of this territory before; that you know it inside out; that you speak the native dialect; that you got out of here because the local government had a warrant out against you for poaching ivory."

Tembo Neale remained woodenly noncommittal. "Since you found out so much, you found out, too, that they had no proof of anything."

"That might have been because you were very smart. What is the meaning of this 'Tembo' appellation?"

The sardonic curl came to Neale's lips. "I guess your enquiries about me were all from 'official' sources. The first native could have told you it means elephant," and he grinned. "I don't know why."

The assurance faded from the officer's voice. "You are a big game hunter, I believe."

"I was," Tembo corrected him. "I quit—because I got me a modern gun."

"Aa-ah! That rather unusual definition of yours about sport, eh? Because they couldn't hit back?" The officer was unexpectedly friendly. "Well, Mr. Tembo Neale, we believe that you *are* very smart."

Tembo remained wary.

"We believe that you could be a very useful man to us in this theater of operations—*if* you would cooperate with us rather than, er, stand off on an aggressive defensive."

"'Cooperate' makes me laugh," Tembo told the officer; and sourly, he did. "I wrote Washington for six months, telling every bureau I ever heard of that I'd been around here before; and then I told my draft board for six more months. So they went ahead and inducted me along with all the rest of mama's boys who'd never left their home towns. Till this commercial outfit thought they could put me to a little better use."

"The, er, confusions in Washington have somewhat hampered us too," the officer admitted. "But that is there and here is here. I propose to put you to better use still—to have you assigned to us for special duty. To—hunt for us."

Tembo's lip curled. "Thanks, and the hell with your job. The Quartermaster Corps has its meat hunters—renegade butchers and slaughterhouse men. I don't rate."

"*Big* game." The officer emphasized the first word.

"There's all too much big game been shot off by the butchers before the all-too-late conservation orders went through."

"Bigger than any you've hunted yet"—the officer pieced out his words—"and this game will be able to hit back."

Tembo stared at him from under frowning brows, sun-bleached against his burned skin. "I'll listen."

"Good. I must explain first—but you can talk to the natives so you must know it, of course. Well, there are these men—enemy—who've escaped our mopping up. Escaped because they know the country, some of them much better than you—colonists who've lived here for years. They know where to get arms. They know the language. They know how to handle natives. They have money. So every now and then a hidden gasoline dump catches fire; a plane makes a forced landing and its guards disappear; an emergency landing field is plowed across. So all right, we catch a few black men and shoot 'em. But we know damn well the black men didn't think of it or organize it."

The officer leaned forward earnestly. He stabbed a finger at Tembo's chest. "The biggest kind of game. They *must* be mopped up!"

Tembo's frowning stare screwed deeper, went through the officer and past him into unseen emptinesses of plain and rock and

ravine. His breath hissed softly between his teeth.

"Ye-eh. You said it. Bigger than any I've ever hunted. They'd be able to hit back all right—plenty! . . . But I'm a civilian—and I've got a soft job now."

"You're an American."

Tembo's far stare went farther; beyond the hot rock and scrub, all the way across oceans. He began to nod and his frown began to twist around to a hard, wry grin.

"Ye-eh, an American. And like a lot of us who're still home, I don't know when I'm sitting pretty and well off."

SO it was that Tembo Neale, civilian, was squatted on a three-legged stool before a native chief's hut. With him was a lieutenant who knew nothing about natives but who knew all about the official rules of A.M.G. He was also without a uniform, however, for the African native has learned to look at all uniforms as a badge of the white-man pestilence that interferes with his own way of life.

The chief was over-fed and prosperous in a land where war had been not so long ago. He was hospitable. His pendulous-breasted woman brought sweet *tedj* beer and he talked for an hour of this and that. Till, the formalities satisfied, he asked, "And what does the *frangi* want in my village?"

Hospitable, but not respectful. It was customary to say *Thilik Baba,* My Great Father.

Tembo said, "I am looking for another *frangi* like myself. One who is generous with goods, such as this enameled beer cup, to people who do little jobs for him."

The chief's face took on a mask of stupidity. He said, "There is no such *frangi* in my poor village. As for this beer mug, it came in trade from a goat herder of my people who got it from a—" and he went into a circumstantial history of the implement. "Perhaps there is such a *frangi* in the big village on the other side of the mountain. Look, there you can see the path."

So Tembo took his lieutenant away. "We'd have to spend a month there and win his confidence against reprisals. These behind-the-line agents are doing a pretty thorough job of keeping the ex-subjects convinced this is only a temporary setback—that they're sure as hell coming and take over again. So we won't take that nice path the chief gave us. We'll follow it only as far as he can see us; and then we'll explore that likely-looking *donga.*"

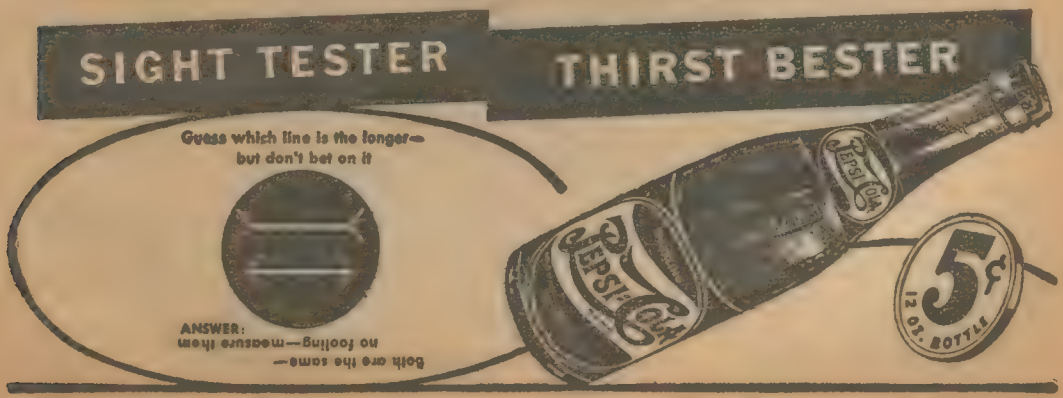
"What's a *donga?*" the lieutenant had to know.

"That erosion ravine. All kinds of varmint hide out in *dongas.* They're bad places to go snooping in. Come ahead."

But that *donga* drew only lesser game—a leopard which looked for a moment as though it might charge and then changed its mind and streaked away snarling and skittering ahead of a barrage of gravel up the ravine's steep side.

The young lieutenant whooped. "Golly! You could have got it, couldn't you? At least, so I've been given to understand."

"It's always luck," Tembo told him, "if you make a fast shot like that. Besides, we're not collecting trophies. And it's bad medicine to holler like that, because somebody else might be collecting them. But



by the same token, there's no man-beast bedding down in this gully. Are your legs holding out to draw another cover?—Well, tomorrow then. It'll be sundown by the time we get back to camp anyhow."

When they got back to camp, expecting the kerosene tin of hot water that is the African bath, and supper, they found that their tent had been burned, their two pack-camels were gone and their three native boys had disappeared.

"Huh! I've been smelling it for a mile back and wondering." Tembo toed the warm ashes with his boot. "And there was me figuring not so long ago sabotage was none of my headache. A fast working son of a gun, this 'n." He scouted around in the dusk. "Well, he concluded, "he didn't kill 'em anyway. But I bet he scared 'em out of working for any *frangi Amrikani* in a hurry. And what's maybe worse, he's gotten him a nice little haul of new ammunish."

"Our ammunition! Will it fit his gun?"

"Brother," Tembo assured him, "those fellows have collected enough guns off of dead Yankees so they can take their choice— Hey, don't blow up those ashes to make a light and advertise for grief! And tuck up the old sore legs. We've got a sweaty three days ahead of us. Mtawa Camp for fresh supplies—and let 'em laugh at us for a couple o' tenderfeet."

Hours later in the night Tembo said, "Some day when we get time we'll have to go twist that fat chief's tail."

Days later, in a deep scrub- and euphorbia-filled, box-ended ravine, where the heat simmered as in a pot, Tembo's frowning eyes lit up. "This," he told his lieutenant with conviction, "is the place. Here's where our big game hides."

"How do you know? This damned thing is exactly like a hundred others we've been through, only bigger."

Tembo toed a hyena-gnawed bone. "A bullet broke that. And I've seen others. He's living off the fat of the land." He surveyed the steep gash in the rising escarpment. "Ye-eh. But how to hunt him out?"

"If you're sure he's here, don't we just hunt him? Tracks, or something? Can't you—er, well, you know."

Tembo shook his head. "This fellow knows his stuff. That's why he's right here. It's half a mile wide and a quarter deep and ten long, with all the cover in the world." Then suddenly, fiercely, "And I've been walking us around in it like any damn fool!"

AS though to prove it on the spot a *z-zwitt* of wind passed between them and shattered rock stung their short-clad bare knees. Tembo was already jumping, dragging the lieutenant with him, before the sound of the far shot came. They brought up together with an avalanche of gravel in a lower hollow full of boulders and thorn scrub. The shot was racketing its echoes back and forth across the steep cliffs above them. Tembo's lips were moving venomously, but the lieutenant couldn't hear him. He was holding a sweat-grimed handkerchief to a thorn gash across his forehead.

Tembo found a place from which to peer warily up ravine. He grumbled disgust at himself. "Just like any tenderfoot fool! So there's your answer. This'n can do some fancy shooting at long range. It's just sheer, dumb Yankee luck that he didn't collect one of us. Fool I am, but not fool enough to hope to trail up a guy like that in this cover. No, sir. Not any more'n I'd expect him to trail me."

"We've got to retrieve our rifles," the lieutenant said. "There they are, right out in the open."

"Let's rather guess," said Tembo grimly, "that our luck's good enough yet that he won't be able to make 'em out that far. And it's just our Yankee luck again that he's up the boxed-in end of this gully—so we can get out the lower end, the way we came in."

"It's damn good luck, too," the lieutenant whole-heartedly agreed. "This blasted hollow is one solid ant-nest!"

"Come nightfall," Tembo assured him, "we'll get our chance. We dassn't move while that kind of a shooter's got daylight. Tomorrow—if we get out—we'll scout around the upper rim and see what may be what. Sit tight and I'll tell you a story about a man I know who had a gorilla staked out and the ants got to it—and the man couldn't get near enough to turn the monk loose."

"Go ahead, and make it cheerful," the

lieutenant said. "I'm sweating enough to drown 'em off of me."

The morrow's scouting along the edges of the upper plateau showed the ravine to be just about what they had expected: a box canyon with precipitous sides and heavy cover, deep enough for a trickle of water to persist through the dry season—which again would mean ample game. A man could defend himself there indefinitely. It would take a company to mop up the place.

Tembo, in moody contemplation, kicked stray pebbles over the cliff edge. "The man knows his stuff, every move of it. So how to smoke him out?"

"Why not just that? Fire the woods?"

"We might up here, but it's too green down there. Let's scout some more before the sun drives us to shade along with the other more sensible critters."

More scouting brought another discovery—and more trouble. Bones!

Africa, of course, is paved with bones. But these bones, gnawed by hyena and jackal, had shreds of khaki cloth about them, and here and there an unmistakable American boot. And under the umbrella-topped acacias were all the parts of a plane.

"So," Tembo put the question grimly, as to a pupil, "what do you read from all this?"

"Why—er, I suppose," said the lieutenant in a lowered voice, "there was a crash and— But why didn't they all die in the plane?"

"They didn't die in the plane," said Tembo slowly, "because it wasn't a crash. Look, the landing-gear isn't smashed. It was a forced landing. And they died because they were shot! Look here. And the plane was broken up and shoved under these trees so the scouting observers would spot nothing. Ye-eh, this man of ours—I mean, this certified devil—knows all his stuff."

"I suppose," the lieutenant said after a tight-throated silence, "this would be that DC-4 with a crew of eight that—disappeared."

He was still looking, big-eyed, at the scattered evidence of ruthlessness when Tembo gave a cracked crow of satisfaction. His nerves jerked him out of his contemplation.

"What beastly thing are you gloating over?"

Tembo was holding a grisly foot and shin bone that still held a native's brass anklet.

"This means that he had native help to round our boys up. It may mean that our boys put up a fight—let's hope. It may mean—and this is a more likely guess—that this clever devil of ours pulled the old precaution of liquidating his help so nobody would tell tales in court if he were ever caught. So that was his mistake and now we've got him."

"How d'you mean, 'got him'?"

Tembo grinned a very hard and tight grin. "You catch devils with deviltry. We'll take my guess and swear it's the truth. All we've got to do is find in what village he recruited his help."

SO Tembo and his lieutenant once again went through the formality of drinking nauseous beer with another native chief. Tembo knew how to do his stuff. He told the chief, "That air-machine that came down up there. Certain men of your village went with the foreign *frangi* to take prisoners. They did not come back."

"Since you know it," the chief admitted, "it was so. Mundu, the son of Dolo, went and Lutha went and N'goro and Diddi and Pwala and others."

Tembo unrolled his bundle of gruesome relics in his undershirt.

"This, then, is probably the leg of Mundu. His women will recognize his anklet. And here is Lutha and these must be Pwala and others. In order that he might not pay what was promised, that *frangi* killed them."

The chief stared like a dazed ox, slowly assimilating the thought.

"So what does your village do about such a matter?"

The chief still stared and made incoherent noises.

And then, since the African native responds easily to the stimulus of vengeance, Tembo gave the orders.

"You will gather all your spearmen and will be at this ravine to hunt, as for any other beast. Now, what places are there where a man-beast might climb out?"

"There are two places," said the chief,

"where the rock baboons go down for water. A strong man might climb out by those ape roads."

"Good!" Tembo said. "Let the drums call your men in. Vengeance is overdue."

Then Tembo led his lieutenant up to the ravine's lip again. The lieutenant said, "But I understood you to say that both those monkey trails scale the cliffs on the *other* side. If they're climbable he could get away."

"Sure thing," said Tembo. "But if we watch at one trail, he might be taking the other. From this side of the ravine we can spot 'em both. And the sun is behind us."

"But what good does that do us—to watch him escape?"

Tembo's whole face stiffened to a fixed hardness, his head thrust forward alertly on hunched shoulders.

"He won't escape. You watch. It won't be long now. You can hear the spearmen yelling down ravine—and our devil will know what that means."

It was not long. The sun lit little ribbons of smooth-trodden trail that angled up between patches of scrub clinging to the cliff sides. Presently Tembo ejaculated, "Ha!" and pointed. "I told you he wouldn't stop to argue with natives yelling on that drum-beat! See him way down there? He's taking the other road. We'll have to move along half a mile. We got time; and this'll call for easy breathing and no heart-thumping."

Tembo squatted on the ravine lip opposite the other monkey path. "Near the top," he said. "That thread of open track across the rocks. . . . Dammit, shooting over empty space is always tricky—but the sun is just right."

"But, good Lord!" the lieutenant said. "You can't—I mean, at that distance! It's all of—"

"All of six hundred yards, I make it." Tembo hissed it through tight lips. "And if you know any prayers, say 'em. I may frighten him so he'll let go—ha! There he comes!"

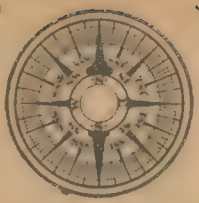
Tembo stood up. "Never could shoot from any of those fancy military target positions. My experience has always been" —he held his breath while he fired—"snap shooting at game on the run."

With the last word the far figure moving across the rockface stood still. The lieutenant couldn't see its hands, but he could see the figure slowly begin to lean away from the rock—farther and farther, like a bow bent backwards, till, like an acrobat, it pushed itself from its foothold. It turned a first slow somersault, suddenly sprawled all arms and legs, then hurtled with increasing speed, bouncing horribly, brokenly from a ledge far out, and disappeared among tree-tops.

"Je-ee-eeze!" The lieutenant whistled. "I never thought anybody could do it!"

"Nobody can just 'do' it," Tembo said gravely. "That kind of shooting is always luck—Yankee luck." And after a long, somber frown into the ravine, came the tight grin.

"Pity we aren't collecting trophies. That devil will have horns."



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A Caradosso Story

TO his good Lordship, my Lord Pietro IV, Duke of Rometia, Count of Pontevecchio, et cetera; from his Humble and Slightly Distraught Servant, Luigi Caradosso, sometime Captain of the Guard, these:

Sire:

With what vindictiveness doth this life of ours pursue us from the cradle to the grave!

Sometimes, as now when I have Your Highness' gracious command to discourse

on the subject of love-potions, I wish I could be taken from this cottage of my retirement and exhibited about the countryside in a cage. Yea, there I would sit behind the bars, I would so, and at every village crossroads the *padrone* who led the horse and poured my victuals to me through a pipe would bang a drum and summon the populace and discourse as to how the assumption of wisdom in youth can destroy a man's comfort in his old age.

Videlicet that when I myself was young and ambitious of captaincy I pretended to the knowledge of many things concerning which I was in fact ignorant. Whenas Your Highness' grandfather wished to re-arm the Guard with arquebuses and the old captain avowed himself ignorant of these engines, behold young Lieutenant Caradosso starting forward full of knowledge, though actually doubtful whether the things shot a ball or an arrow; this brought me my promotion without costing me my life, but I paid for it; I could show Your Grace the wounds. And so I proceeded, as most young fellows do, advancing myself as it were on credit, without ever reflecting that some day I should have to pay the account—as we all must, be our deeds good or bad, Lord have mercy on us! I builded myself up such a repute as a wiseacre that Your Grace's family deemed me, after only forty years of service, worthy of this cottage and a pension; and now it is this very repute which prevents me from enjoying either of them. No sooner have I

ILLUSTRATED
BY
L. STERNE STEVENS

Paoli Gobbi wheeled his horse, rode up to Giuseppe, struck him squarely in the face with his fist and knocked him out of the saddle.

untied my points and taken my shoes off and put my feet on the windowsill and a flagon at my elbow, than up must come a courier from Your Grace, demanding my counsel on some damned thing. Last week it was the advisable charge of powder for demi-cannon, about which I complain not, because it is a military matter and may be answered briefly. This week, as God looks pityingly down upon me, it is love-potions. Well—

Sometimes I think Your Grace solicits me, not for advice at all, but merely for old-soldier tales such I used to tell Your Highness twenty years ago, when you would do me the honor of sitting on my knee in the guard-room. In the present case, I trust this may be so; for if a prince so happily married as Your Lordship, and with two such fine children, should be interested in love-potions for their own sake, why then I should foresee consequences. . . .

IN fact (now I bethink me) the instance I have to retail to Your Grace has to do not with love-potions, but with their antidote, concerning which Your Grace must, methinks, intend to inquire. To be plain and in order with you, I was at the time—1537 or thereabouts—in the service of a young lord who was badly taken with this malady and wished to be cured of it. There are various kinds of love, as there are of other fevers, ranging from the violent or raging sort to the variety whose victim dwawleth and pindleth away. My lord Giacomo's affliction was of the latter kind; he would sit, I mean, staring at walls, and he complained of hollow feelings in the stomach while making no visible effort to fill the void with food. Moreover, the blessed sun could not go about its nightly business of setting without reminding this poor lad of the lady's hair—it chanced to be red, a color I loathe, though prized by collectors—nor could any poor blue flower push up in the gardens without being hailed by him for its likeness to her eyes.

He did not say such things to me, of course; but when one sees the lord of four counties uprooting weeds and kissing them and wearing them for a nosegay, what is one to think? His response to music was also very lamentable. When a singer would perform one of those caterwauling ballads about somebody dying for some wench, he would sit with his chin in his hand as if stupefied; and when the fellow would strike his lute and propose to sing something cheerful for once, he would wave him to silence and demand the other song over again.

I suppose I should have said earlier that the lady would have none of him; I forget why—he was a handsome lad—but anyhow, she scorned him and here he was in a very driveling condition.

Your Grace may have the hardihood to point out at this juncture that the love-affairs of nobles are no affair of the captains of their guards, past *or* present; but experience proves the contrary. Be the soldier actively employed or a poor old pensioner, he may not with impunity let his lord suffer, no matter how irrelevantly to his own business. If, being a pensioner, he confines himself to his trade of farming while his lordship's soul itches, he may find himself suddenly deprived of his farm. If, on active service, he polishes his armor while letting my lord's wits wander whither they will, he may find himself getting the said armor battered to bits in God knows what futile skirmishes, not to mention the possibility that he himself may be knocked on the head.

The situation in this county of Nori was bad from a political point of view; and from a military viewpoint, worse still. I mean not only that there were nobles on all four sides each of whom considered himself to have claims on some portion of my lord's domain. That is the usual state of affairs—a little more acute in this case than in others, but nothing out of the ordinary; the political situation always will be bad until either everyone has everything he could possibly desire, or nobody has anything.

The military situation, on the other hand, had been excellent, but it was bad now because of those arquebuses I mentioned some time back. Up to that time—and I had been a soldier nearly twenty years—the trade of war had been conducted on reasonable and proper principles: hand-to-hand, so that one could see with whom he had to deal, and with a very pleasant, brotherly give-and-take

attitude between the officers. It was understood that we were professional men, paid to direct any killing that might be necessary, but no more expected to be killed ourselves than great artists are expected to clean their own brushes. We would make our dispositions, placing and moving our infantry and cavalry according to the rules of the game. We might, while the battle was in progress, foregather in some corner of the field and hammer each others' hauberks a little, just to give our lordships their money's worth; but it was all very friendly and harmless—I remember Matteo Scarlatti telling me jokes during one such fight—and the drudgery of knocking out each others' brains was left to the common soldiers.

With the coming of those infernal arquebuses, however, all was changed; the invincible trouble with them being that their bullets would pierce armor, and at such a range that it was impossible to keep the arquebusiers from shooting at officers. One might issue the strictest orders, but when the subordinate is wrapped in a cloud of smoke, how can one see that they are obeyed?

WAR, under such circumstances, was to be avoided at all costs, meseemed; and for this avoidance, it was urgently necessary that my lord should come out of his lovesickness. All the world loves a lover—for the simple reason, it has always seemed to me, that there is nobody easier to rob. Drunkards and madmen usually retain some idea of the value of their possessions; the lovesick, happy or unhappy, are apt to be as prodigal with their goods as they were with their wits; the trouble being, from the point of view of their guard-captains, that sooner or later they recover their senses, want their lands back and there you are, being shot at.

Accordingly I watched my lord Giacomo as a cat watches a mouse, but for a long time there was nothing I could do. His lordship's position in life prevented me from converting him to my own views on the sameness of women; and the nobility of the lady placed difficulties in the way of solving the problem by taking her myself. I would have done it, for after all, red hair is better than an arquebus ball in the belly; but the fashion for guard-captains had not then set in, and hanging is a death I never have taken kindly to, either.

Behold me, therefore, in a dilemma which kept me awake at nights; until (like all the dilemmas over which we lose sleep) it was resolved by means entirely outside my imagination. I determined thereafter that never again would I fret in the night hours over a future I could not possibly control; and, with five or six thousand exceptions, I never have fretted since.

Costecaldo was where the lady lived. We had been over there in state. It was exceedingly hot weather; the armorer had taken in my gorget one more link than I had told him to, the fool, so that it chafed damnably; and on that day of all days, a young springald from Rome had had to be visiting the family, so that I had had to stand ceremonially outside the door for fourteen livelong hours.

During these hours, I had had nothing to amuse me save what snatches of conversation I could hear through the door, and what glimpses of the great hall I could catch when the servants would go in and out with the cool drinks and the empty dishes. From these eavesdroppings and glimpses, it appeared to me that the red-haired lady was making a fool of my master for the benefit of the aforesaid young springald (a habit ladies have when they are perfectly sure of a conquest) and I feared in my bowels what might come of that day's work. The noble to the north of us had recently infringed on my lord's boundaries to the extent of two meadows; I wondered whether the lady's coquetry would bring us enraged orders to go recapture those damned fields, or whether it would so sink my lord in despair that his neighbor might filch further, giving us more and harder work to do later on.

What I did not forsee, *imprimis*, was that the door would suddenly be thrust open from within, and that out would come my lord and this youthful Roman, both red in the face and jostling each other for precedence like a couple of street-urchins.

It was evident to my experience that

they had had words within and that they were withdrawing to bring the matter to blows where they might not shock the lady's sensibilities. As was most natural, the lady appeared in the doorway slightly after them, making sounds of dissuasion, but actually intent on seeing that the brawl should redound properly to her glory; when they went down to the courtyard she would be watching from behind a curtain—but meantime, as was customary in those days, I loosened my sword in the scabbard and advanced so that its hilt would be convenient to my lord in case of urgency. The young Roman's guard-captain, who had been on duty at another door, had followed his master out of the hall, but he made no such move as mine. Doubtless he knew

The door was thrust open suddenly and out came my lord and this youthful Roman, jostling each other for precedence like a couple of street urchins.

his master, who in fact did seem fonder of words than of swords.

"Thou rough brute—thou yokel—" he gasps at Giacomo; and when my lord puts forth his hand toward my swordhilt, gives a sort of scream. "Paolo—quickly! He's to murder me!"

Paolo was this captain of his, who now stepped forward with evident intention of laying hand on Giacomo. This being impermissible, and my sword encumbered by his lordship, I reached forward (asking pardon) between the two nobles and smote the captain on the nose-end with my fist so that he fell down clanging. I was on my way to stamp on his belly so that he might not arise and cause a disturbance when, it seems, the young Roman drew dagger and attempted to stab me in the spine. I turned at the noise of a heavy thud and found that my lord Giacomo had most kindly and condescendingly protected me by striking his fellow-noble very shrewdly in the mouth. This had cut his knuckles (as I could have warned him, had there been time for consultation), but its effect on the young Roman was well worth the wound. He was of the new-fangled, paint-faced, lisping kind which women (God knoweth why) were finding attractive at that period; and to see him in a corner, spitting out teeth and with one of his false eyebrows hanging down his nose, was gratifying in the extreme. But not to the lady.

THIS was not the sort of fight for her favors of which traveling minstrels might sing with any credit to herself; and so she told us, while calling for *her* guard-captain (but he was an old friend of mine) to drive us forth bodily and refuse us admission henceforth. He winked at me, did old Giovanni, and by kissing motions of his lips expressed joy at what had befallen; but my lord Giacomo was pale as he had been red before, and it was even wagering, in my opinion, whether he would spend that night writing letters of contrition to the lady, or in drowning his humiliation in drink.

What did not enter my imagination was that, having ridden home with a face on him like a poisoned cat, my lord Giacomo would send for me to his cabinet and propose I should ride north in search of love-potions.

Aha! Your Grace thought I was an old man maundering; but here I am, back to the subject.

Actually it was the antidote he wanted; all one; all quackery, all rubbish. But, rubbish or not, I welcomed the chance to be off from among the menaces of that county at that moment.

"I regard thee as in some sort a friend, Luigi," says my lord, all unaware how often I had heard those same words from gentlemen in trouble.

I saluted, having found that friendship of this kind doth not dispense one from discipline.

"I have been," says he, pulling a feather-pen to pieces with trembling hands, "some little afflicted in my mind of late, Luigi."

"Indeed, my lord?"

Indeed, my lord, God help me; twenty-three hours on duty at that moment, a muck of sweat from head to foot inside my armor, my neck raw from the gorget and my throat as dry as a lime-burner's hose; and having to pretend ignorance of what the very scullions in his kitchens were joking about as they worked!

"Yes," says his lordship, wasting seconds that seemed like hours while he wondered how little he need tell me. Me that knew more of his love-affair than ever he would himself!

"Ye may have noticed," says he, taking the plunge at last, "how that—"

And he told me the whole story. Worse; he began with a quarter-confidence, extended it to a half; and then, as his feelings proved too much for him, brought out the entire history, twenty-five words at a time. Between stanzas, he would walk up and down the room, seat himself in chairs, get up again, fling himself on couches, beat his breast with his fists, hold his temples as if he feared his head would burst, and try to relieve the tension therein by tugging at his hair; through all of which I had to stand there like a graven image. I distracted my mind as much as possible, of course, thinking of a little affair I myself had on hand down in the village; but it was necessary to salute and grunt sympathy at intervals, so I had to

pay some attention to his discourse; and no intensity of thought about Agata sufficed to cool me or make my neck hurt less.

"Now," says my lord, having exhausted himself just in advance of my decision to simulate a fit, "here is the kernel of the matter, Luigi. The astrologer who was here the other day told me—with scorn, because the matter was not accomplished by his art—of a noble who was in similar straits and who was cured of his passion by alchemical means. I would say that this alchemist brewed him a posset which—"

He made many words of it, as lads will, considering their love afflictions unique in the history of the world; but the upshot was orders to ride north and get this potion for him from one Lodovico della Fortezza Bianca, seventeen miles north of Trano. I knew the country, chancing to have a couple of children thereabouts.

"Hardly a mission for a soldier," says my lord, favoring me with a ghastly smile, "but as I say, Luigi, I regard thee in some sort as a friend—"

Poor lad! Getting my clothes off in my quarters, giving instructions to my lieutenant for during my absence, I was almost as sorry for him as I was for myself; which was very sorry indeed.

I made myself feel a little better, though, before I slept.

The lieutenant, coming for his orders, had to stand to attention while I lay in bed; and, being of the battlement-guard, he was in armor as I had been.

"The captain is leaving us, then?" he inquired, as respectfully as I had had to speak to Giacomo.

"For a few days," I said; and then the devil tempted me.

"It will most like have escaped your notice," I began, stretching myself and speaking slowly, "but for some time past, his lordship has been some little afflicted in his mind."

He struggled, poor fellow; but discipline held him.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes," says I, putting my feet comfortably on the cool windowsill. "Now, Lieutenant, regarding thee in some sort as a friend—"

II

SO far, so good; and I had a very pleasant ride north.

But your lordship will judge of my consternation at finding on arrival at this Fortezza Bianca that its lord, whose love-cure was the cause of my journey, was actually wed, and that recently!

I had heard rumors to this effect from Trano onward; but now the news, which I had hopefully discounted, was made official by none other than his lordship's guard-captain, a hospitable fellow built very like an ape. He received me at first in the capacity of envoy, all very proper, with a quarter-guard and so following; but after I had spent an hour or so in the ante-chamber, he took pity on me as a fellow-soldier and said I might spend the rest of the waiting time in his quarters.

"It's likely to be longish," he said, putting the formal cups away after the first drink and bringing out wooden noggins that would really hold some wine. "His lordship and her ladyship are quarreling in her apartments. Well, Captain—here's blood, death and promotion!"

"This puts me," I told him, honoring the toast, "in a position somewhat—"

"Ye mean the marriage?" says he. "I saw that. What's the trouble? Your lord trying to get rid of a damaged sister or thatlike?"

"Worse," says I and, giving him the cross of my dagger to touch in the usual way, exposed the matter frankly.

"No doubt," I ended hopefully, "this whole story of the love-cure was a lie of that astrologer. So I can return—"

"Nay," says he, looking down into his wine-cup and shaking his head. He sighed. "It grieves me, Captain. Only last week, I was within an ace of cutting that alchemist's throat—had an excellent chance, but I was wearing a new doublet and thought I might get blood on't—and so he's still alive. Were he dead, of course—"

"Well," says I, "it would appear at all events that his potion is of none avail. Why should I—"

"Aha," says the captain, "but it is to be considered that this lady my lord's married is not the one of whom he was cured. Look, Luigi, here is the case. He was en-

amored of a wench with no fortune, who moreover treated him too kindly, so that he mooned about the place and the countryside and made life a misery. So at one and the same time, there came amongst us this alchemist fellow and this Donna Sancia that could buy and sell his lordship and most of the nobles hereabouts five or six times over. So the alchemist brews the potion and my lord here marries the lady. The essential ingredient is gold."

"Of the potion, or of the marriage?"

"I meant the potion, but the question is—*hic!* pardon—shrewdly put."

"Oh," says I, nodding at the captain.

"Ha," says the captain, nodding back at me; at which moment, a very loud, vulgar bell broke in on our conversation.

Judging from the way he choked on his mouthful, let his chair down on its four legs and started to fasten his gorget with one hand while putting down his stoup with the other, this was his lordship's summons. I therefore rose, fastened my own neck-piece, wiped my beard and shook myself more comfortably down into my clothes.

"Quick, quick!" says Monkey-Face (he would have gone without his guard-ribbon, but for my pinning it on him) and hurried me along corridors in evident terror lest we should make his lord wait even a minute.

Lodovico did not, in fact, appear to me the kind of lord who would thrive on suspense. He was some little pale with rage after his discussion with his lady, but at the best of times his eyes must have struck me as ominously bright and close together, and his lips as denoting an impatient and domineering disposition.

He gave his guard-captain a look which promised much trouble for him later; and to me, envoy as I appeared to be, he vouchsafed only, "Well?"

It took me aback.

"Well, sire—" I began, fumbling.

"Don't mimic me like a magpie," says he, and dictated, " 'May it please Your Lordship—' "

I adopted this form of words, stated my case with an eloquence which surprised me, made my apology for troubling His Grace on the strength of an obvious misinformation, and hoped I might be permitted to withdraw. Somehow, since I had met this Lord Lodovico, the state of affairs at home seemed more appetizing to me than it had. There, to be sure, I was likely to find myself with from one to four wars on my hands at any moment; but I felt myself more able to deal with them, arquebusiers and all, than with this gentleman who sat scratching his chin and considering me.

"H'm," he says at last; and considered me further. Watching his features, I found myself thinking of a lock I once saw, on the lid of a strong-box made by an apprentice for his masterpiece. One turned the key—the machinery was two feet long and one broad—and this little piece of steel pushed that one, and that one pulled upon yonder spring, and the spring actuated a bolt, and the bolt a tumbler, and the tumbler something else again until suddenly *click!* four great bars of iron leaped forth and the chest was locked.

"Ha!" snaps Lodovico. And just as the mechanism of that lock, its work completed, had shone in the light, so now he smiled upon me. It was a very fine smile—frank, open and friendly; but of course not very impressive to me, who had learned even by then to judge men by the expressions which flicker across their faces, rather than by those they habitually wear. Only when one's life is at stake (as it always is, in the service of princes) does one realize how unimportant are the larger gestures, the words and even the oaths of men, and how important the droop of an eyelid and the curl of a lip-corner. Ah, ah, ah!

"I am disposed," says Lodovico with benevolence, "to accommodate my lord Giacomo."

I BOWED. I have sometimes thought bowing (so popular among envoys) was invented as a means of concealing the movements of the eyelids and lip-corners aforesaid.

"But," says my lord, "the matter is not entirely simple. Firstly, this alchemist is a man by whom I set great store."

I had expected something like this. "Ho," says I to myself.

"Secondly, his potions are not of the sort old women sell at street-corners.

They are confected according to the nativities of the persons to be affected. The processes of distillation and sublimation takes time—the stars must be in proper aspect—*and*—er—the herbs and simples used in the preparation must be native to the habitat of the patient."

The alchemist must come pick his flowers at Nori, I translated this; and (to myself again) said, "Hum!"

"Which being the case," says Lodovico, smiling in a way to melt a heart of brass, "how say you, Captain: Shall I refuse to let my gem among chemists go to a lord who might seduce him from me—or shall I accompany him myself?"

What I said outwardly was that His Grace must decide the matter as his wisdom dictated, that I was sure my lord would be enchanted to make his acquaintance and all such rubbish; but what I said inwardly was, "Ho hum!"

"It is inconvenient," says Lodovico, frowning, and wrestling very realistically with his circumstances, "but I know—none better!—your lord's predicament. Aye, aye. And so—"

And so we set forth, Lodovico taking leave of his lady in tones that frightened the birds out of the trees in the courtyard; and so we came to Nori, on whose borders his lordship called me to his side and suggested discretion.

"Meseems that if His Grace Giacomo knows me to be wed," says he, "it may somewhat detract from his faith in the potion. Let us therefore say nothing of the matter. Eh?"

I rolled my eye around at his escort, which was quite considerable; but he said he could trust them.

"They know better than to babble their master's business," says he. "If there *be* indiscretion, I shall know whom to blame."

He smiled as he said this, but again I was watching his eyelids, and under them there showed quite plainly a little picture of the results of his blame. So quickly did the picture vanish that I could not make out whether a knife was involved or a bottle of poison; but the upshot was unmistakable. The more so since to one hand of me rode that monkey-faced guard-captain, and to the other that alchemist, all hooded and muttering; a nasty beady-eyed fellow he was, thin and pale as if he had boiled himself in one of his own alembics. Since he had been on the road, moreover, this ape-captain who had seemed so brotherly had, as it were, withdrawn to his citadel; turning out also to be an arquebusier himself and the commander of arquebusiers. This guard that rode with us was armed throughout with stink-pipes, and at one of our halts Lodovico had had them practice their weapons. The target was a tree scarce as wide as a man and full seventy-five paces away from them; and not a rogue of them but sent his chunk of lead smack into it. When I thought of what that one discharge would have done to a charge of honest cavalry, my stomach turned over within me.

"I can count on you, Captain?" says Lodovico; and, feeling this was no time to exhibit my full feelings, I saluted.

"Then at the next halt," says he, "perhaps it would be as well for you to ride ahead and advertise his lordship of our coming."

I DID so, grieving to see how love unrequited had continued to prey upon my poor lord, and grieving still more to see with what joy he welcomed the arrival of this Lodovico to lift him out of his misery. To a thoughtful man, it is always woeful to see any one of God's creatures relying on another to do for him what he cannot do for himself; woeful enough when the matter is merely one of lending money or suchlike; but no less than tragic when the help sought is for the mind. A surgeon—or even a soldier—can invade the fleshly body with steel and alter it within limits, but who can cut into the soul, even into those suburbs of it which deal with such things as love? No; all anyone—even a priest—can do is to tell the sufferer what to do.

"What like is this Lord Lodovico?" asks Giacomo, staring at me all haggard. "Is he indeed—"

"He would appear," says I, saluting, "to have made a remarkable recovery."

"And this alchemist—is he coming?"

I had just said that he was; but I saluted again and said aye.

"Does he seem a learned man—a trustworthy fellow?"

"Your lordship," says I, trying with eyes and lip-corners to convey all sorts of meanings, "will doubtless judge him by his works."

"Yes, yes," says Giacomo, eager past any attention to my hidden meanings. "Luigi—I think they are riding into the courtyard. Yes, it is they indeed. Hasten—hasten! I will come down. Go and receive them properly—hurry, man!"

Naturally, on entering the castle, I had been received by my lieutenant; naturally I had given him the necessary orders, and naturally all the guard-formalities had been fulfilled by the time we reached the main gate. Under other circumstances, I should have been insulted by the suggestion that I had failed to arrange such matters; but I realized (as I have tried to convey) that my good young lord was in some sort demented, and so I made allowances for him. It is one of the numerous contradictions of this world that the poor, the weak, the underlings should have the privilege of extending indulgence to the rich, the strong, their overlords. The master will rage and rant if his servant be a minute late in the serving of a marchpane; the servant will see his master commit enormities unmentionable with no more than a tongue-click and a wagging of the head. One would think that it should fall to the strong to make allowances for the weak, but seemingly God hath ordained otherwise.

"Welcome, welcome, my lord!" cries Giacomo, bursting in on the formalities about which he had been so anxious. He helped Lodovico out of the saddle with his own hands and kissed him on both cheeks, instead of on one as is proper between nobles at first meeting.

You may be sure I watched the eyes and lip-corners of his lordship of Fortezza Bianca at this juncture, and you may be sure I beheld what I expected.

"And here," says he, like a cat that hath licked the cream, "is the man who shall, I hope, bring solace to Your Lordship as he hath to me—Fra Silvestro."

If that fellow was a friar, I was (and still am) a sixteen-year-old virgin; but he stepped forth in the character, hands up sleeves, bowing his capouch only slightly. For a moment, I thought poor Giacomo was going to kiss him also.

"Apartments have been arranged for you in the north tower, reverend sir," says he, breathless, "and anything necessary shall immediately be provided. Captain!"

I saluted.

"Conduct Fra Silvestro. Now, my lord—if you will do me the honor—"

Orders are orders, and I obeyed this one, jostling the alchemist some few times on the stairway and, when we reached his quarters, eating an apple from a bowl on the table to show that I cared not a fig for him. Having demolished the fruit, I threw the core in the air, drew sword and cut it in two as it descended. I did not know exactly what was toward, but hoped this might affect it. Nothing so discourages the operation of subtle brains as the thought that they may be suddenly scattered on a floor.

THAT my lord Lodovico was concerned with something a good deal more subtle than loving kindness was already evident and became more so during the evening. A banquet was of course obligatory; their lordships ate alone as regards company, but with Monkey-Face and me on duty behind their chairs, and quarter-guards for each of them facing each other across the anteroom. There was no danger; the men—including us officers—might have been better occupied playing knuckle-bones or begetting new taxpayers.

I have often spent such meals in wishing that, since I could have performed my duties equally well that way, I had previously died and been stuffed; but this repast was more interesting. My lord Giacomo had come to table some little drunk, and for one thing it was noteworthy how Lodovico got him drunker, while himself retaining his wits.

"It's a great deal of gold," says my poor lord, pondering the supplies to the alchemist, which they must have arranged before supper. "But, as you say, brother, worth it, by God, so that I am freed from this spell! When you were so afflicted, brother, didst wake up in a morning happy, and then think of her and have mis—*hic!*—misery descend on thee like a cloud?"

"Ah!" says Lodovico, wagging his head. "And sometimes during the day, be doing this or that—reading, or walking on the battlements—and be seized suddenly with a pain here, under the heart?"

"Indeed, yes," says Lodovico. "But—it may not be the same with thee—the worst of my affliction was that I cared naught for any thing. The affairs of my country went to ruin. I could not endure to visit my neighbors, and when I did I was silent and withdrawn, so that they liked me not—"

"Mine own case 'zactly!" cries Giacomo, flinging a lock of hair out of his eyes and thumping the table with his fist. "I've no spirit left—everything is a burden. Fellow to the north of me—Giuseppe Balta, his name—stole two fields of mine. I should have boxed his ears, challenged him to fight, sent Luigi here to butcher his cows for him—and what have I done? Nothing. Red hair and blue eyes—my ruin. Yes."

"Giuseppe Balta?" says Lodovico, as if surprised; too much as if surprised. "But this is very strange!"

"What is?" asks my lord.

"Look you, Giacomo, the finger of Providence is in this. I was about to offer my aid—since thou're indisposed for company—I would circulate among the nobles on thy behalf, representing thee, as it were."

"Very brotherly!" says Giacomo, rising, coming round the table and patting Lodovico on the back. "Ah, had I a born brother like thee, Lodovico!"

"And now it appears," says the visitor, patting Giacomo's hand, "that this lord who hath been profiting by thine abstraction is a cousin of my own!"

"Who—Giuseppe Balta?"

"The same. Brother, my cousin shall give thee thy fields back forthwith, or I will bloody his nose for him worse than I did when we were boys together."

Giacomo went back to his chair with the expression of one who witnesseth miracles.

"A cousin of thine," says he. "And thou knew it not. Come hither to bring me aid, and yet more aid follows. *Hic!* Very wonderful. We'll drink to it. Lodovico, thou'rt a good man. Heaven hath sent thee. No doubt of that at all. Thy cousin. Mar—*hic!*—velous."

"Now furthermore," says Lodovico, drinking a toothful while Giacomo drained his flagon, "if my experience is anything to go by, thy peasants have been left with their complaints unanswered. Your Lordship hath not been seen about the countryside, asking after their families as they like us to do—God knoweth why—"

"True, true!" says Giacomo, thumping the table. "Every word of it true. Lodovico, y'are gifted; the second sight; prophecy. All great and good men have it. But I forgot—ye've been in the same trouble as I. What like was she, Lodovico? Had she red hair?"

"I forget," said our guest calmly, almost causing me to gasp.

"Forget?" Giacomo, not being on duty, could gasp at will and did so.

"Aye. Fra Silvestro's potions work not by halves, brother. What I was about to say was that he—Silvestro—will be going about the countryside gathering simples for thy cure; and while he gathers simples he may reassure simpletons. With thy permission, brother."

"Shall I," asks Giacomo, staring at his benefactor, "forget what color *her* hair was?"

"As I am," says Lodovico, stretching his legs under the table and smiling very carefree, "so shall you be, brother; and within a month of now. Aye, and before that, maybe. And now come, let's walk on the walls and be merry."

They departed; one staggering, the other pretending to; and at last I got to my quarters, disarmed and went to bed.

I was exceeding tired; but, for reasons which may or may not be apparent to Your Grace, I did not sleep.

III

WE now come to a series of events for which I must bespeak Your Grace's statesmanlike understanding, together with a memory of my record in the service of Your Highness' family. Much as enemies have belied me—and I had to break a man's nose for it only last week—I am not a man of violence. Save when acting under orders, or when I apprehend danger to myself or my master, or when I am personally affronted, I am as mild as

any lamb; always have been. I should think that my face, bearing no fewer than twelve of my thirty-seven wound-scars, would convince any reasonable person that during my sixty years of soldiering, I was more sinned against than sinning.

I am quite sure, for instance, that I have sent more men into this world than I have sent out of it. . . .

The misunderstanding I am about to expose to Your Eminence concerned this Lodovico's guard-captain, this Monkey-Face, whose real name I have the misfortune to forget. We had drunk together, as I have told Your Grace; but from the moment I learned he was a firearms man by predilection, I had begun to look askance at him, and as time passed, with him resident in my own guard-quarters at Nori, I liked him less and less. That he should have spoken, as he had at Fortezza Bianca, about murdering the alchemist, proved him to be of a deplorably ferocious disposition; and that he did not kill the man, with all the opportunities I arranged for him, convinced me that deep designs were in the weaving.

Always in a spirit of brotherly helpfulness, Lodovico had insisted that his guardsmen should share the watch with ours; whereby it came to pass that half the wall-sentries at any given time were arquebusiers under the command of Monkey-Face. In a fair fight, I would have backed my pikemen against any number of musketeers; but what I feared was some unfair fight in which they might be picked off like sparrows.

There were other things that liked me not at all. For instance, when Lodovico had rated his cousin Giuseppe roundly, in the presence of my lord and me, for stealing those fields, it had seemed strange that I should surprise him talking very friendly and confidentially with the said Giuseppe in a corridor, while my lord Giacomo was mooning over some music.

Then again I much misliked the fact that, while all the gold Giacomo could lay hands on was going to this alchemist for his medicines, gold was also turning up in hands unaccustomed to the feel of it—*videlicet* in those of Antonio Puzza, a damned rebellious farmer in the countryside where Fra Silvestro traveled looking for his herbs. Providentially, this Puzza

Violent by disposition, this Monkey-Face came raging up the stairs at me with his sword in hand.

died about this time—by violence, someone told me. Another would arise to take his place, no doubt, but I had a breathing-space. I devoted this to the endeavor to rouse Giacomo from his love-stupor, but in vain; he dreamed on and mooned on, waiting for the alchemist to perform miracles while Lodovico (among other activities) stupefied him more and more. My hints went for nothing, and when I had this small trouble with Monkey-Face—

It arose after two or three weeks of insistence, on his part, that his arquebusiers should be assigned the wall of honor, over the main gate. He claimed it as due to a guest, and Lodovico supported him, and I knew by experience that Giacomo in his amorous daze would agree—thus taking the key-defences of the castle out of my hands, while leaving me with the responsibility of them.

I put this view of the case reasonably and quietly to Monkey-Face, saying that I would stab the first arquebusier who

took station on the north wall; and when he started to rush off and disturb their lordships' supper with complaints, I laid a gentle hand on his shoulder to restrain him and in wrenching himself free he chanced to fall down a small flight of stairs. If I had a ducat for every flight of stairs I had been up and down in my life, I should not now be a poor old pensioner; but this Monkey-Face, violent as I have said by disposition, must take these dozen or so of steps as personal to himself and come raging up them toward me with his sword in his hand!

WAS I to stand there and be spitted like a pullet? A guest is a guest, but a madman is a madman; I drew my own blade, purely with the idea of defending myself until such time as I could explain matters to him. But he fenced well, God rest him, and against a fellow who knows his weapon, one may not defend oneself effectively without attacking.

This was a small, round sort of place at the head of the stairs; and Your Grace will judge of my intentions when I say that we circled it four or five times with me, Luigi Caradosso, continually giving ground, before I loosed one offensive stroke at my attacker; and then I only cut his ear off. Instead of sobering him, bringing him to his senses as is usually the case—I must have applied this corrective a dozen times during various arguments, and always until then with good results—this reminder seemed to redouble his fury. After a dozen more passados, in some of which he almost touched me, I struck at his other ear; but there was no dealing with such a man—crazed with blood-lust until he could not stay still for a moment—and so the tip of my blade caught in his mouth-corner and extended it backward over his cheekbone. He swore a great deal about this, with a strange bubbling intonation due to the blood, and rushed forward at me with such suddenness that I had not time to get my point out of his way and it stuck into him an inch or so under the breast-bone. Feeling that this could not conduce to his health, and fearing to put myself in a disadvantageous posture by pulling it forth, I did the next best thing. Putting foot to his stomach, I pushed him away from the blade.

In the confusion, I had not noticed that he was standing at the head of that unfortunate stairway; and that is how it happened that he fell backward down it for the second time; but dead, this time. At least, he was dead when they picked him up; which makes it none the less a lie to say that I killed him and flung him down. As I have shown, his demise was practically a pure accident, with no disrespect intended at all.

But would Lodovico hear of such a thing? Nenni, nay, nay, and by no means. So furious was he, in fact, when I was called before my lord Giacomo to give an account of the incident, that for some moments I hoped he was going to stab me—I say hoped, because I had a very nice shirt of mail under my tunic and imagined that an attempt at murder might startle Giacomo's eyes open. However, there were—as we say in the country—no flies on my lord Lodovico; he stormed and he raged, and demanded that I be dismissed, but he laid no hand on me. And to the demand for my discharge—which Giacomo in his trance might have granted—I had the perfect answer in requesting that I be paid my arrears of wages, amounting to six hundred and forty gold crowns.

I knew Giacomo had turned every gold piece he possessed over to this alchemist for brewage—ha ha!—and I was well assured that Lodovico would not disgorge precious metal when he could rid himself of me (he thought) with mere steel or arsenic.

"At least," says our visitor, when he had raged himself nigh to exhaustion, "I request—I demand, my lord—that this ruffian be disarmed and confined to his quarters, and that an officer of mine take over command of the guard."

Ah, ah! He should not have said that. Like all invaders and usurpers, he had over-estimated his success. Having overcome Giacomo's wits, he had presumed to trample on the spirit, which will not cease to writhe until its owner be dead.

Giacomo sat bolt upright in his chair for the first time in many a month—his habitual posture had become a slouch with his chin on his chest—and spoke

sharply, instead of in his usual weak drawl.

"Captain," says he, "consider yourself under arrest. Turn command over to your lieutenant. Send him here."

I saluted, and had not backed all the way out of the room before Lodovico was salving the issue with the ointment of apology.

"AND how did my lord receive them?" I asked the lieutenant when he returned from his interview.

"Carelessly," says he. "He's back in his cloud cuckoo-land again. Lodovico's having to promise him that the potion will be ready in a few days. What does that mean, Luigi?"

"Y'understand Italian, don't ye?"

"Yes," says he doubtfully.

"Then why ask advice of a disgraced man?"

"Why did you kill the guard-captain?"

"There'll be more killed than him, unless you keep your eyes about you," says I—not choosing, for reasons of discipline, to explain to him how the whole thing had been an accident, as I have told Your Grace. "And it would not amaze me if one of the slain were yourself, Lieutenant. Good night."

It was no longer my duty to make the rounds, but from force of habit I wandered the circuit of the battlements just after the change of the morning watch; and whom should I find, leaning in an embrasure—alone for the first time since Lodovico's arrival and looking woefully up at the moon—but my lord Giacomo, whom, according to etiquette, I saluted at the halt.

"Dismissed," says he, without thinking; and then, "Nay—Luigi, come here."

Poor man, to what a condition was he reduced! I do not say "poor gentleman," because if ever I saw a human being stripped of fal-lals and down to his bare humanity, it was he. Aye, when first I had entered his service he had been a fine, independent lad, rather of the random sort, very bright of eye and brisk about his business; now here he was with his eyes looking very much like those of a peasant about to be hanged.

"Have you ever been in love, Luigi?" says he—and there was a damned question to ask a soldier in the prime of life! Having always left such idiotic emotions to the women involved, I was about to enter an indignant denial, when pity overcame me and I stuttered something that might comfort him. Misery loves company.

"And what did ye do about it?" asks the unhappy man.

"Well, sire, that depended on the circumstances. Some of them I married; then there were others—"

He took his head in his hands.

"Enough, enough!" says he. "We talk of different things, Luigi. Oons, it seems impossible that you and my lord Lodovico can be walking about in comfort, enjoying your lives, while I am thus beset, bedeviled and destroyed!"

I could sympathize with him there, having marveled at the composure of other people whenas I myself had the toothache.

"I would give everything I have," says he, "to be either in your shoes or Lodovico's. I would give anything I possess to be in anyone's shoes but mine own! Look you, Luigi, I am like a man that has been flayed alive and hath every nerve in his body exposed to the world. The music that used to give me pleasure is now an intolerable pain; instead of enjoying the world about me, I now feel inclined, at every beauty of it, to burst into tears. Even wine, that used to make me merry, now flings me into misery. What am I to do?"

Who was I to tell him? It seemed a time to change the subject. There was a light in the north tower, where the alchemist dwelt; so, taking as text my lord's remark about giving everything he had, I proposed that we should go together and see how the reverend magician was progressing.

"Yes, yes," says he feverishly, "Thank God thou came along, Luigi! My lord Lodovico is unwell and hath gone early to bed; I was going mad there by myself."

But it proved that my lord Lodovico had not gone to bed; or that if he had, the repose had improved his state out of recognition. My great height, enabling me to look in through an arrow-slit before we reached the door of the alchemist's

apartments, enabled me to see his lordship sitting at a table with the said wizard, apparently dividing with him various piles of gold coins, and both of them laughing very heartily.

BY the time, however, that we had been admitted (Giacomo scratching timidly at the door) the gold had vanished from view, solemnity covered the alchemist's features like a tent, and Lodovico, head in hands, gave the impression that he had never even smiled in his life. It appeared, from his account, that his illness had grown on him and that he had sought his magician for cure. He had had a potion —the dregs of which looked to me extremely like wine—and now, rising, professed himself magically cured.

"And so shalt thou be, brother!" says he, putting his arm about Giacomo and leading him over to the far end of the room. "Look!"

I followed, and looked and saw nothing and knew it; Giacomo, seeing exactly what I saw, was vastly impressed. I mean that the whole northern alcove was full of alembics and tubes and pipes leading hither and yon, some of them with diverscolored waters in them, and here and there a little charcoal fire ready to heat one or other part of the apparatus; but so far as there was any proof to the contrary, the liquids might have been beet-juice and cabbage-water; and if one of the alembics did seem to contain a couple of dozen gold pieces—well, I was of opinion that they would have been serving a more useful purpose in someone's pocket. Mine, for instance.

But to Giacomo, it was marvelous; which shows that magic, like most other things, is in the eye of the beholder.

"And this very night," says Lodovico, hugging my lord, "there is news for thee at last. Thy patience is to be rewarded. Tell him, Silvestro."

"I have finished the distillation and the sublimation by three stages," says the fellow as if reluctantly. "Now on Tuesday Mars will have ceased to afflict Venus, and Jupiter will be in propitious aspect to the sun, so that I can complete the rectification."

"And when can his lordship have a dose?" I broke in eagerly but was hushed.

"By Wednesday," says the alchemist, looking at me as he might at a cow in a sacristy, "Venus will have completed a grand trine with—"

I forget what further rubbish he added, but that sufficed. Wednesday was the day; I made very sure of that; so sure that Lodovico quite took offense.

"What's it to thee, Master Caradosso?" he asked, hissing the civilian title like a snake.

"Nothing, my lord," says I hopelessly —ha ha! Wednesday was two days hence; I had time enough.

"What hour of the day?" asks Giacomo; for which I could have kissed him. "At dawn?"

A glance seemed to flash between Lodovico and the friar—God save the mark!

"Was it not later in the day that thy grand trine would be complete?" asks his lordship. "Some time about the midst of the afternoon, was't not?"

"Three hours and seven minutes after high noon," says Silvestro, "the blessed planets will be in precise orb."

"So—" says Lodovico, smiling; but there were tears in the eyes of Giacomo.

Their lordships went away together; and, having nothing profitable to say to the alchemist, I went down to the quarters of my lieutenant. He was reading a book on the military art—a book, when he had me for a teacher! Flinging this out of the window, I seated myself, and told him that the blessed planets would be in orb at three hours after next Wednesday noon.

"Planets in orb? What planets?" says he, all aghast. "What dost thou mean, Luigi?"

I told him; left him more aghast still; and then—having been relieved of my command and having business in the countryside—thought it no harm to let myself privily and discreetly out of the castle.

IV

AFTER all, Your Grace knows me; the story of my life for the past sixty years is written into the history of Your Highness' family—a good deal of it with my own

blood for ink. So, just as I might have spared myself all those protestations about the killing of Monkey-Face, so now I refrain from pointing out that despite ingenuities which have caused me to be known as the Gray Fox, I am essentially a man of frank and open nature, abhorring duplicity, stratagem and concealment—except, of course, in cases where these are necessary to confound the wicked. If everyone were as I am, man would meet man in the market-place and strike hands with the cry of "Brother!"; everyone would know everyone else's business—as why not, since there would be nothing to cause shame? In short, this world would be a better place, an earthly paradise.

Since, however, at the time of which I am writing it was not so, naturally I had had to make arrangements lest I be surprised by those not as candid as myself. In the four counties surrounding Nori, I had accordingly employed various honest poor men, not to spy on their overlords (a despicable practice, leading to civil strife and trouble for guard-captains), but to supply me with details of the private lives of lesser folk like councillors, secretaries and officials of the palace. Knowledge of who climbed up to whose balcony on what moonlit night hath enabled me, from time to time, to avert much bloodshed; besides, of course, promoting marital fidelity and all those things.

Fortunately, one of my best men lived in the territory of this Giuseppe Balta. He had not always been of that country, but had sought refuge there, more or less on my advice, after the death of that damned tax-grudging Puzza, to whom I have already made allusion. What I should have done without the fellow at the crisis whereof I speak, I do not know; it was a real grief to me when, some years later, the man turned treacherous and had to be hanged. I tried to atone by doing what I could for his widow—a fine buxom wench she was, I remember; but I digress.

MY departure from the castle was, as I have said, discreet. I had engineered a little private exit for use in case of need; one never knows, in new situations, and I had then been at Nori less than a year.

My return, on the other hand, was sadly public; it appeared that my lieutenant had somehow got wind of my absence and had reported it to their lordships Giacomo and Lodovico a bare couple of hours before my return. This was on the Tuesday; it had been Sunday night when I had left the castle. Lodovico was loud in his advice that I should be dismissed, discharged, flung neck-and-crop out of the place. Giacomo, listless as ever and even more under Lodovico's dominance now that potion-time was so near, seemed almost inclined to let him have his way; which forced me to descend to the dire level of protesting that I was but human.

"Being off duty," I said, "I thought it no harm to seek solace—a little comfort, my lord. In any case, I could not help it. I had to go down to the village."

"Some woman," says Lodovico scornfully, and I hung my head. Through my eyebrows, however, I could see my own lord's eyes light with sympathy.

"Why, Luigi!" says he; but Lodovico was relentless.

"May I point out to Your Lordship," says he, "that this man was not merely relieved from duty, but was under arrest for killing my guard-captain. This arrest he hath broken, and for two days hath been at large like a wolf, probably begetting more murderers like himself."

"Nevertheless—" says Giacomo, sighing and looking at me kindly.

"At least, dismiss the fellow while we discuss his crime," cries Lodovico. "To have such a man standing there all defiant makes me rage!"

"You may go, Luigi," says Giacomo, instead of giving the formal order—fellowship in affliction is indeed a strong bond!—and I went to my quarters in a high sweat. I had wondered ere that why mountebanks at fairs should always come down from strolling on their tight-ropes bathed in perspiration; now I knew.

I was comparatively dry but still looking haggard, when, late that afternoon, I presented myself at the alchemist's apartments in the north tower. One thing I never had doubted about mountebanks—and he was a mountebank as surely as any who sold ague-medicines from booths—was their fondness for money; wherefore I had my whole fortune, consisting of nigh one hundred gold ducats, in a bag

at my girdle. Up my left sleeve, I had metal of another kind; but it was on the gold that I placed my reliance.

And not, it appeared, unjustly. No, the fellow's beady eyes flew to the bag the moment he opened the door.

"SSSH!" says I, pushing him within and closing the door after us. "Brother, I am in great trouble."

"So I hear," says he, grinning and still looking at the bag. I had an impulse to shave that grin off his face, but refrained.

"And I shall be in worse," I told him hoarsely, "unless thou help me, Silvestro."

"What is thy trouble?" says he, sitting down amid his crucibles. I could see his mind working, like snakes under a cloth.

"The same as his lordship's," I said.

"A woman, eh?" says he. "Broke thy arrest for her, eh?"

"Yes. And I shall break it again, unless—"

"It would be the worse for thee."

"It would be ruin, but I shall do it; I cannot help myself unless—"

"Unless—unless!" snaps the alchemist. 'Unless what? Eh?"

"The potion," says I, laying hand to my bag of gold.

The snakes of thought behind the cambric of his countenance seemed to be writhing furiously, biting one another. He himself bit his finger, staring at me.

"The potion?" says he. "But that's for his lordship, not for a common rogue like you."

Oh, oh, oh! And a long, sharp dagger up my sleeve—

"Thou must have brewed more than will suffice His Highness," says I urgently, while the angels and archangels above marveled at my patience.

He was shaking his head slowly from side to side and smiling—but thinking, thinking.

"Some few drops left in the bottom of the—" says I, waving my arm at the alembics or what not. "Come, reverend sir! Take all I have, but give it to me!"

"How much is that?" he asked, and I flung the bag on the table. He picked it up and weighed it in his hand; but, judging by the expression of his face, this was not all he was weighing.

"When wast thou born?" he asked, and I told him: the twentieth day of December, 1500.

"Sagittarius," says he. "On the cusp of Capricorn. That falls well."

He peeped into the bag to see if its contents were gold or silver, and seemed pleased by what he saw.

"I risk my livelihood—" says he, in the eternal tone of rogues who want gratitude added to their profits.

"Ye were here," says he, still thinking furiously, "when I advised His Grace of the propitious hour for taking this priceless draught. Taken at any other time, it would be ineffectual; even dangerous."

"A few minutes after three hours after noon. Tomorrow," says I, nodding.

"I myself," says the rascal, "shall give the potion to his lordship at the auspicious moment; but thou'lt be in thy quarters at the time, and it's not to be expected I should carry cups to *thee*."

O Job! O Griselda of the impeccable patience, have mercy upon us!

"Besides," says he, getting up, pouching the money and going over to his gallimaufrey of tubes, "the difference in nativities makes the hour for taking in thy case a little different from His Grace's. Three o'clock to the moment, for thee! As soon as the shadow touches the figure on the dial—hast any means, in thy quarters, of telling the time? Thou must be alone, and thy door locked, at the moment of ingestion."

"I'll have one of my men watch the dial in the court and call me."

He came back with a little phial in his hands. It contained a clear liquid like water, and by God, it really seemed that he had used gold in its confection; little flakes of the metal were swirling about in it; very pretty.

He put it into my hands; and in an experience which even then was sadly extensive, I had never seen such a look as he gave me therewith. When I have told my tale, Your Grace may remember that I here make no attempt to describe it, and may imagine it for yourself.

"Be careful!" he whispers. "Tell no one; take it exactly as I told thee. Begone!"

It was weary waiting, Your Highness, very hard on the feelings; and under the circumstances, I thought it inadvisable to

drink. I spent the evening, and indeed most of the night, with my lieutenant and had the satisfaction of preventing *his* drinking. In fact, I took the whole issue of night-wine from my own guardsmen and turned it over to Lodovico's fellows; it added to the ill-feeling between the parties, but I could not help that.

He picked up the bag of gold and weighed it; but judging by his expression this was not all he was weighing.

I WAS still awake at the dawn—which made it nigh to seventy hours since I had laid my head on a pillow—and then, though I lay down on my bed, I could not sleep.

From dawn to three o'clock in the afternoon seemed like a space of years;

but at last the bell struck—I had stationed a man by the sundial to strike it at the precise moment when I had been told to take the potion—and, chancing to be in the corridor outside his lordship's quarters at the time, I threw open the door of his cabinet without knocking and walked in.

Lodovico was there, of course, and my lord Giacomo; and the alchemist, this last in the act of handing Giacomo the potion on a golden salver. It was a larger dose than he had given to me, and there was more gold glittering about in it. I noticed this while observing the stricken look of amazement on the magician's countenance. He had, of course, thought that I was in my quarters, with the door locked. Ha!

Lodovico also was very pale and seemed astonished—at my presumption (he said loudly) in thus entering the room uninvited.

"But we'll deal with him later," he cried, laying hand to his dagger and stepping toward Giacomo. "Meanwhile, my lord, the propitious hour is here. If this fellow interferes, it will pass. Silvestro—give his lordship the draught!"

"By what the reverend friar said the other night," I observed, stepping forward in my turn, "there are still some five or six minutes before Venus and Mars are in orb or what not. Meantime, let Your Grace consider that of late there has been a little she-cat hanging about my quarters."

"He's mad!" gasps Lodovico, seeming, however, rather relieved than otherwise. "Call the sentry, Giacomo, and have him removed."

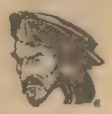
"This little cat," says I, putting my hand in my bosom (he thought it was for a weapon, but it was not) "hath lately been affected by the warm airs of spring so that she cried continually during the night-time, disturbing my rest."

"The moment is passing!" cried the alchemist, pushing the potion forward almost to Giacomo's lips. "Drink, Your Grace, or the efficacy will be dissipated forever!"

I drew from the bosom of my tunic what I had been carrying there, and exhibited it to His Lordship. It was a very small thing, very humble but at sight of it Lodovico and the alchemist seemed —turned to stone while my own lord stared at me amazed.

"Always the friend of animals," I said, "meseemed that the poor little cat should not so suffer: so, for ninety-seven gold ducats I bought the dregs of Your Lordship's potion and gave it to her. Behold her, cured of love!"

It was, of course, the little cat that I had drawn from my bosom. She was cured—of love and everything else; very, very dead indeed.



I DO not know what Lodovico said—it was perhaps a mere scream, without words — or what good he thought it might do him to stab me; but he sprang forward, dagger in hand, and so I struck him on the nose-bridge with the steel glove I chanced to be wearing, and he rolled clucking across the room. The alchemist was still so frozen with dismay that I could take the famous potion out of his hand before striking him. He rolled, by strange coincidence, in the same direction as Lodovico, and came to rest across the body of his master. I went over and rubbed my thumb on the eyeball of each of them, judging that they would be quiet for at least half an hour.

Nevertheless, blowing my guard-whistle, I set a sentry over them before turning toward the amazement of my lord.

"What—what—" he was stuttering, white as a sheet and his fingers like aspen-leaves in a breeze.

"If Your Highness will lead the way to the battlements," says I, bowing, "events may explain themselves better than can any poor words of mine."

"Luigi," says he, "I—I—"

"If Your Lordship pleases. . . ."

He went; and oons! even now, fifty years later, my old heart rises and sings at thought of the perfection of the sight I had to show him.

The battlements outside my lord's quarters were some little raised above the enceinte. We looked down on the curtain-walls, with the walk above the main gate immediately below us.

Here, Lodovico's men should have been on guard; they were present, certainly; but unconscious and bound, every man-

jack of 'em, without a shot fired from their precious arquebuses. This was because I had had all their matches well soaked in water, while they were drinking the night before. My own fellows were on guard with those stink-pipes; perhaps not very expert in their use, but very willing to fire at whomever might approach the main gate, and with dry matches to do it withal.

IT appeared indeed that someone had intended to approach that main gate; to be plain and in order with you, none other than Giuseppe Balta, cousin to my lord Lodovico, who was now sitting at the head of a strong cavalry force a quarter of a mile away. Poor man, he had expected the gates to be open, whereas they were closed, and the portcullis down. Furthermore, by my instruction, the cannoneers of our four guns were waving their lighted linstocks in a manner he may have construed as threatening.

What may, however, have halted him more certainly than any other of my measures—and what seemed principally to astonish my lord Giacomo—was the fact that from three other points of the compass, three other forces of troops, as strong as Giuseppe's or stronger, were converging on the castle, under the banners respectively of the lords of the lands adjoining ours in those directions.

I had, to be frank with Your Grace, spent the hours when I was absent without leave in making the round of these nobles, telling each of them separately (and, as he thought, exclusively) of Giuseppe Balta's intentions; and inquiring whether he (the lord addressed) would not wish to have his share in the partition of my lord Giacomo's acres. Each and every one of them had said with some heat that he would be present with troops to make sure he got his fair share; so here were all four of them, each expecting a half of a carcass which was not yet dead.

I had scarce finished explaining this to my lord when my servant ran up with my half-armor and said all was ready. Within three minutes, I was riding out through the main gate at the head of all our mounted troops, with Giacomo, still in his chamber-robe and mute with bewilderment, on a very fine black horse just ahead of me.

We halted in full view of the four forces, and their leaders, accompanied by those fool arquebusier-captains of theirs, rode forward to parley. I bowed to the nobles, who regarded me with distaste; bit my thumb unobtrusively at three of the captains, and at Giuseppe Balta's—under pretense of flicking dust from my tunic-sleeve—measured my forearm. Ha, ha! Your Grace knows the gesture! He insisted on fighting me for it a week later, God rest him.

What's this?" says Paolo Gobbi, a grim fellow who held to the west of us.

"My lord Giuseppe—" I began, but he silenced me.

"Damn Giuseppe Balta!" says he, rolling a white eye at that unfortunate; and the other lords murmured, "You, Caradosso—what scheme is this of yours, you fox?"

"The scheme was entirely his lordship's," said I. "Or rather their lordships—my lord Giuseppe and his cousin Lodovico, who now lies under my master's power of life and death, back there in the castle. The plan was to seize these lands and that fortress, after my master here had been poisoned by a pretended love-potion."

I said nothing of the intentions toward myself, because I had been an accessory after that fact, ha, ha!

"Is this true?" demands Paolo Gobbi of Giuseppe and my lord both. He had been a *condottiere* in his time, had Paolo, and misliked poison.

"My lord Giacomo," says I, "is some little indisposed from the shock and may not answer. His lordship Giuseppe will deny the facts; but his face admits them."

Indeed, the wretch tried to stammer, but no words would come forth. He sat there blanched and trembling; and all of a sudden Paolo Gobbi wheeled his horse, rode up to him, struck him full in the face with his fist and knocked him out of the saddle.

"Damned poison-mongering milksop!" he roared—doubtless with some shade of annoyance at the trouble to which he himself had been put without reward. To fight coward Balta for half a county would have been feasible and even enjoyable; to fight

four lords, one of whom was the legitimate owner, was manifestly absurd.

So he rode up to Giacomo with extended hand and embraced him. So did the other two lords, while Giuseppe picked himself blubbering out of the dust. They were profuse in their love and congratulations; one would never have thought that they had come to feast, as it were, on Giacomo's corpse.

"As for that rogue Giuseppe—" says Paolo Gobbi, returning to the rage which suited him better.

"He hath a field or two of ours," I suggested mildly, "which my lord's recent abstraction—"

"He shall have them back," roars Paolo, "or I'll nail this milksop's ears to the table at the next Council of Nobles. Hear me, ratface?"

Giuseppe gave no sign; he climbed into his saddle (even his own guard-captain did not dismount to help him) and so retreated toward his own troops. Within a week, he had not an armed man serving him, and soon afterwards jumped off a tower into his moat. So his lands were divided among the four of *us;* very friendly; very just and pleasant all around.

MEANTIME, having tactfully rid ourselves of our new friends (my troops stood solidly in the way of entry into our castle), we trotted back home; closed the main gate, laid aside the arquebuses, put out the linstocks, unloaded the guns and proceeded to do justice on Lodovico and the alchemist.

If justice it can be called.

I would have hanged the two of them out of hand; or at least the alchemist; since Lodovico was noble, I might have put him in a dungeon and forgotten to send him food.

But Giacomo was otherwise-minded; he sat behind his great table and spoke quietly to Lodovico.

"Thou'st failed to hurt me," he told him, "but thou'st wrecked thyself in this life and the next. Go home, false friend, and God have mercy on you."

Lodovico said nothing; stood there trembling for a minute, unable to make his eyes meet Giacomo's, then burst forth from the room as if devils were after him.

Whereupon that filthy alchemist flung himself on the floor and groveled.

"My lord—my lord—" he sobbed.

I stirred him with my foot and asked tenderly after my ninety-seven ducats.

"Hear me—hear me!" he screamed. "The poison, my lord—Your Grace—Your Highness—God help me, have mercy on me, I am a poor man! He said he would kill me— My lord, there is a true potion—I swear it, to cure great gentlemen like Your Honor of ignoble passions—"

"Ha?" says Giacomo, standing suddenly and flushing scarlet. "*Ignoble* passions, you dog?"

"Passions — noble — anything—love—I swear it! I cured my lord Lodovico so that he forsook his love and wed a rich woman! I can do as much for Your Grace—I have the true potion in my rooms—"

He babbled on until Giacomo put his hands to his ears; whereupon I blew my whistle and had two sentries carry the wretch forth bodily, still groveling, albeit in mid-air, and shrieking of this true potion, we might hang him if it failed.

"We're to hang in any case, my lord?" I asked, halting the sentries at the door, in case he might wish it performed then and there. There was a fad at the time for hanging assassins from their lords' own windows.

He shook his head. I lowered my hand, and the screaming diminished down the corridor.

"Will Your Grace then try this other potion?"

He walked over to the window, which looked toward Costecaldo where the lady lived; and he stood there for some time.

When he turned again, I saw that the excitement which for some hours had made a new man of him, had now departed, leaving him as love-lorn as ever and exhausted besides.

He sat down in his chair again and put his chin on his fist.

"Nay," says he; and seemed to reflect. "I am in bad case, Luigi," says he; and I knew in what case he was. Because, to be frank with Your Grace (as I was not with him; nor have I been with anyone else in these my eighty years) I had once felt that way; nay, more—God help me, if for a moment I weaken, I have twinges

of the same agony even yet. I had known a girl many years before that, in 1523. Maria Bari was her name; she died.

"I am in great pain," says my lord, "and I think that perhaps the poisoner is telling the truth now. I might take his potion and become—like my lord Lodovico."

He sat silent for some moments more, looking at the poor little ball of fur which had been my kitten. I buried the kitten later with my own hands, and raised a little monument of stones at its grave.

"No, I would rather be as I am," says Giacomo. "Better a live heart and the pain that goes with it, than a dead heart."

At first I thought he meant the kitten; but no—he meant Lodovico. It was some time before I apprehended his full meaning and I never knew just by what stages his love-affair progressed thenceforth.

I left his service for a better, some six months after that. He was still being scorned by the lady and moping at sunsets and weeping at music and losing weight by the handful; whereas Lodovico, up north in his own country, was said to be extending his lands vastly by all sorts of shady enterprises.

Then, four or five years afterwards, while fighting in the Romagna, I heard from a free-lance captain that the lady with red hair had relented and reformed and was married to Giacomo, with three children already; while Lodovico, having quarreled beyond endurance with that wealthy wife of his, had at last poisoned her and had been beheaded by order of the Council of Nobles.

I do not know the circumstances in which Your Grace finds himself; but I trust that, whatever his need of or dealings with love-potions or their antidotes, he may long be spared to add glory to the Duchy of Rometia and

To pay
The pension
of Your Highness' Humble
Willing Good Servant
L. Caradosso
Captain

P. S. I never did regain my ninety-seven ducats from the alchemist. I calculate that, with interest from that date, they would now have grown to one hundred and seventy-two.

ENDORSEMENT

Paid to the writer hereof, by order of His Grace, two hundred florins for no good reason that I can see.

Biondi
Treasurer

"IF I MUST DIE—"

By

ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

THE mate's eyes opened to an immensity of burning blue sky. Pain knifed his skull and ground with a dull ache at his broken leg. He set his teeth against a groan, and lay listening to rhythmic oars and the wash of the sea along the side. Then he heard Captain Bone's voice from the bow.

The captain was spouting poetry again, addressing the Nazi submarine commander they had picked up with sixteen of his men from a rubber boat—only a few hours before another and luckier sub fired a torpedo into the old *Mary Jolly*.

"Take this for your text, Lansdorf," the captain began. "'If I must die—'"

"Pipe down, damn you!" shouted the mate, whose patience had long been exhausted.

"It'll do for you, too, Mister!" retorted Jeremiah Bone, and went on dramatically, "'If I must die, I will encounter darkness as a bride, and hug it in mine arms.'"

The mate swore, and tried to lift himself to a sitting position. Somebody put water to his lips.

"Drink this, Mr. Mason," Lansdorf urged in his cultured English. "When you can talk, perhaps you'll reason with our friend. He's set course for Brazil."

"Brazil?" Mason mumbled, and his head cleared. "But that's twelve hundred miles! It's only six hundred to the Cape Verdes!"

"Yes," Lansdorf whispered. "But he's got a gun. . ."

The mate closed his eyes again, considering. All along he had suspected that Captain Bone was crazy. Mason had come aboard at Liverpool after having a ship bombed out from under him on the Murmansk run, to find Jeremiah Bone gone to a place called Stratford-on-something-or-other—for the express purpose of buying a book.

"My fifth copy of the Bard," the old man said when he returned. He squinted at Mason oddly in the gloom of his cabin and placed the book lovingly on a shelf by Knight's *Seamanship*. "My fifth. Lost one in a full-rigger that foundered off Tierra del Fuego, and another when the *Sea Dart* burned in Hampton Roads. Had to abandon one with the tramp steamer *Macaw* in the China Sea. My fourth was full morocco with gilt edges, and that was lost in the last war. I'll never forgive the U-boat that torpedoed the old *Western Maid!*"

Mason showed no interest, then or later. Jeremiah Bone opened the orders which had just come aboard and asked Mason to read them. The old *Mary Jolly* was to proceed to Rio for a cargo of coffee and hides for Hoboken.

"Good!" grunted the captain. "She's too slow for convoys."

He looked at the book, and said something about prizing volumes more than his dukedom, even though the Bard brought him bad luck. He said he was something of a night owl. Mr. Mason would take over, pretty much, in daytime. Captain Bone would supervise nights, while the second and third stood the watches.

This suited Mason, who was ambitious for a command of his own. Old Jeremiah Bone was overdue for retirement. When they got back to Hoboken a word to the owners about the captain's eccentricities might do the trick.

And last night when the torpedo struck, the old man hadn't been supervising. He was in his cabin, arguing heatedly with the German sub commander. It seemed Lansdorf had studied at Cambridge and considered himself an authority on what he called Elizabethan literature...

THE mate dozed and woke with a start to hear loud voices. The argument was on again. He sat up, and Lansdorf propped kapok life-jackets at his back. He saw

ILLUSTRATED
BY
SAMUEL G. CAHAN

Gun flame caught the crouching figure in a split-second silhouette. He spun around with a cry as Captain Bone fired.

that his splinted leg was resting on a board lashed to the thwarts. A German sailor was at the tiller, just behind Mason. Germans were at the oars. Mason looked forward, where Jeremiah Bone hulked in the bow—and saw that he and the captain were the only Americans in the boat!

"But the Baconian theory is preposterous!" the captain was saying. "And what did this fifth earl of Rutland ever write?"

"The majority of the plays!" retorted Lansdorf. "There is internal evidence. He was a Cambridge student, and he traveled extensively. One finds many university terms in the dramas, and a knowl-

edge of Milan and other places which could not have been obtained second hand. The actor was unlettered—almost, in fact, illiterate. He—"

"Look here!" Mason yelled. "You're both crazy! What's this about Brazil? What are you doing with a boat full of Nazis? I suppose you left our own people to drown!"

The captain leaned forward to squint at him behind a pair of dark glasses. He had a book lying open across his knee, the wind ruffling its pages, and a revolver was on the thwart at his side.

"Mr. Mason," the old man said drily, "I'll have none of your lip. It happens there wasn't time after we were hit to divide the prisoners. We lost the other boats in the night. Maybe they turned east. But the old *Mary* was steaming for Brazil, and, by God, that's where we're going!"

"You're crazy!" Mason said again. "And you're through! Even if you live to see land, you'll never get another ship!"

"I know," Captain Bone said humbly. He lifted his weathered face so the sun shone on it. "I know. But the old *Mary* will never have another skipper, and that makes it easier. She was mine for twenty years. You didn't see her go, Mister, but she died like a queen. Like Falstaff, she had a kind of alacrity in her sinking."

Mason groaned. "Damn it, Captain, the Cape Verdes—"

"Pipe down, Mister!" the captain ordered sharply. "We're bound for Brazil. And now don't bother me—I'm behind in my reading!"

He bent over his book again, turning pages and read aloud in a sonorous voice. He pulled out a pocket compass, held it away from the revolver, and barked orders to the tillerman. Lansdorf shook his head significantly, and put his lips to the mate's ear.

"The gun," he whispered. "He will fall asleep, and then it will be easy."

But if Captain Jeremiah Bone dozed that day, it was behind the dark glasses and no one knew. Lansdorf kept binoculars on the horizon without seeing anything. Toward sunset the wind freshened, coming out of the east, and the captain had a makeshift sail rigged. Before dark he ordered water and food doled out sparingly. The gun was always ready.

Mason slept fitfully that night, waking once to hear Captain Bone ordering Lansdorf to keep aft and sit down. The German came back sullenly, muttering to himself, and later the mate heard Lansdorf snoring. Dreamless slumber came to Mason sometime before dawn.

That second day was a nightmare of pain and delirium, through which he heard the old man's continuous voice and was unable even to express his contempt for poetry that seldom rhymed. But Captain Bone stayed awake. The sun was straight overhead, and when it moved west they followed it. All the time they were sailing deeper into the Atlantic, farther from the chance of rescue. . .

The mate lost track of time. There was a night when the wind was high and spray drenched his broken leg. He woke to find chill gnawing at his broken bones, but his head was clear and cool, and he was conscious of movement in the boat.

He raised on an elbow. It was Lansdorf, stooping low, creeping cautiously toward the old man in the bow. . .

The mate licked spray from his cracked lips. Lansdorf would put the boat about and head yonder for the lightening east. To the Cape Verdes. That old fool in the bow couldn't keep seventeen Nazis in hand. He was crazy, and Mason was helpless.

But Otto Lansdorf was a German. Mason remembered the Murmansk run, and the dive-bombers screaming down, and a desperate pride for his own kind stirred within him. That was his voice suddenly shouting, "Captain Bone! Captain Bone!"

GUN flame caught Lansdorf's crouching figure in a split-second silhouette and the roar went flatly over the sea. Lansdorf spun around, clutching his right arm and crying out sharply.

"Get back, damn you!" commanded Jeremiah Bone. "Get back, or I'll blow you over the side!"

The mate leaned back, wondering, and Lansdorf came to his place. "You!" he snarled, breathing hard. "You with a broken leg, and he takes you twelve hundred miles! You Americans are all either stupid or insane!"

One of the sailors bandaged Lansdorf's shattered arm. The sun rose hot, and drove the pain from Mason's leg. He sat up with a renewed interest in his surroundings, and saw the beard on Captain Bone's drawn, weary face. The captain still wore the dark glasses.

"How long have we been adrift, sir?" Mason asked.

"Seven days, Mister. Feeling better?"

"Yes, sir. Captain, I'll have to be the night owl, now. I can sleep better days, with the sun on my leg. You can't read at night, so you'd better sleep then."

The old man smiled. "Much obliged, Mister," he said. "Like Gonzalo, I'd give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground. But I shouldn't kick. I'm catching up on my reading. It happens I'm as fair a Shakespearean scholar as any ship captain my age who never went to Cambridge!"

"Shakespeare," Lansdorf grunted, "said comparisons are odious."

"You're wrong there!" Captain Bone exclaimed triumphantly. "He said *odorous*. Dogberry, in *Much Ado About Nothing*—Act Three. I'll find it for you."

"Please don't bother!" the German said, coldly furious.

Mason smiled and picked up Lansdorf's binoculars. He looked northward and saw only sea and sky, and then swung the glasses across the bow of the boat. Jeremiah Bone loomed large in them, and the mate held the captain in their focus, studying the old man's seamed face.

Captain Bone lifted the book at that instant, and the title was plain on its spine. The mate jumped. It was Knight's *Seamanship*.

"I was right," announced the captain. "Dogberry, the constable, is speaking to Verges. He—"

The tillerman shouted and pointed into the southeast. Mason jerked the glasses that way and saw the ship.

Captain Bone put down his book. "Fire off a rocket, Mister!" he ordered. "Lansdorf, you've got the glasses. What do you make of her?"

"*I* have the glasses, Captain," the mate corrected softly. "She looks like a Liberty."

Captain Bone nodded. "That's what I'd judge," he said, but he was looking in the wrong direction. The mate remembered a lot of things, then. How Captain Bone had asked him to read the orders, back in Liverpool, and how he had avoided the topside in the brightness of day. . .

"Yes, sir," added Captain Bone. "She looks like a Liberty ship, and she'll be heading home. You see, Lansdorf? You see why I wouldn't head for the Cape Verdes? You'd have been interned there by the Portuguese, and it would be far too good for you. You belong in a prison camp. I haven't forgotten the old *Western Maid*, Lansdorf, and that prized copy of Shakespeare! And this time I was determined to save the Bard if I saved nothing else!"

Lansdorf's grunt was that of a beaten man. Jeremiah Bone picked up his book again and began reading aloud from the pages of his memory. Even in darkness, the mate thought, Captain Bone would never be lonely.

THE

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

JUDGMENT OF QUILADO

By KENNETH PERKINS

"The eruption of the great caldera on Mount Quilado is at hand," the Jeremiah said as everyone in the room turned to stare at him. "It is my warning that you flee this city tonight!"

A MAN dressed as a monk came to Don Pasqual's house and threw the guests into a panic. It was a quiet party at which the dancers preferred the sedate tango to the bolero or danzon conga. The older guests—coffee planters, exporters and some Americans from the mica mines and oil fields—played moderately in the gaming-room. With the same moderation they cooled themselves with sherbets rather than with the *don's* Spanish brandy.

This monk—a rat-bearded, skull-faced Frenchman—walked right into the gaming-room.

"It it conforms, I would speak to the host."

A handsome old Venezuelan in white dinner jacket looked up from his cards. "If this is an urgency, *padre*," Don Pasqual said, "I will talk to you in the library."

"It is urgent but not private," the monk said. "Hence the more who listen to my warning the better." He raised his hand so that the sleeve of his robe fell back revealing a skeletal arm.

"Sort of a Jeremiah and a nut," an American oil man said.

"The eruption of the great caldera on Mount Quilado is at hand," the Jeremiah said as everyone in the room turned to stare at him. "It is my warning that you flee this city tonight!"

The guests stopped playing, not because of the preposterous words but because the man was, without a doubt, insane.

Newt Bradford laughed aloud. The

monk's eyes bored into him savagely, but the young American didn't bluff easily. He was playing good poker tonight and he wanted to get on with the game. "Telling us when a volcano is going to blow up—that's a good one!"

The monk singled him out with a shaking finger. "Scoff at me, *Americano,* but I know the signs. There was the sound of retumbos, an underground roaring which I heard in the rain forests. And I know by the flight of the birds and the yodeling of the toucans—"

"I know all about the birds," Bradford chuckled. "They warned the Indians about the eruption of 'Seventy-eight. Is that what you mean?"

"That is only a legend," an old coffee planter said. "The Indians taught the birds to talk and threw them into the pit crater to pray to the fire gods. Birds do not know when a volcano is going to blow up any more than I do."

"They know when the fumeroles around the crater are smoking!" the monk almost screamed.

More guests came in from the dance floor. Newt Bradford was astonished at their alarm. But, he reflected, these natives of San Justo were an imaginative sort, and a prophecy about Mount Quilado was just the thing to start a panic. They lived under the shadow of the great volcano and likewise under the shadow of a terrible memory. For some of the older men had actually seen the thing happen sixty-five years ago when Quilado buried this city under brimstone.

Newt was thoroughly mad. He knew the effect this prophecy would have on his business. He had trouble enough, what with the war, in getting laborers, balm-tappers, clerks for his factory and wax-palm concession. They loved excitement and delays and rumors. A prophecy like this would stop all business in town for a week! "You and your birds!" he raised his voice. "And your fumeroles! The fumeroles are always smoking around the crater! Why are you trying to scare us this way? You must have a reason!"

The monk raised his fists. "Very well then! It is God—not the birds—who told me!"

The host stood up, tall and majestic. He spoke with his usual gentleness. "All right then, *padre.* God told you. But who are you?"

"I was a physician in Lyons before the fall of France, but now I work as a missionary among the Guaraunos. They likewise know—"

Don Pasqual made a quiet gesture for him to stop. "Please. You are frightening my guests. I do not wish to be harsh. I am asking you kindly to go away." He looked at the crowd of young dancers at the door. "Let the orchestra resume. Let the dance continue! I regret this incident."

The monk said, puffing after his outburst, "I have done my duty before God in warning you! The *portero* of this house would not listen but tried to prevent my entrance at the door. Likewise the muleteers I met on the road from the forest laughed at me. But you—you who are educated men—you will do nothing?"

Don Pasqual said politely, "I will report this thing to the *alcalde* at once. I will tell him especially of this strange matter of the birds." When he saw the monk turn dejectedly and limp, almost staggering, to the door, Don Pasqual said in a changed voice, "You have traveled a hard journey, *padre.* My *portero* will bring you food and wine in the patio. Hence the matter is closed."

NEWT BRADFORD, picking up his hand, could not concentrate on the cards. The players had all started talking, naturally enough, about the eruption of 1878. In that year and in this same month the top of Mount Quilado blew off and two hillside pueblos went up with it. Between the caldera and the coast, all the Indian villages were flooded by lava rivers. In San Justo no man or burro or ox or dog or bird survived the gasses. Only certain residents who happened to be down at San Justo's seaport, Cuchita, were able to get to the anchored ships. Newt could not forget the picture the monk had made—the cassock tattered by jaragua grass and thorn, the bone of a gray arm with a knobby elbow, the eyes red with savanna fevers. Somehow he identified the horror of the '78 eruption with this modern emissary. In those eyes shining with the queer iridescence of lava there seemed to burn

the frightful memory of an eye-witness. This of course was impossible, since the monk could not have been more than forty years old.

In trying to forget him, Bradford found himself playing more and more recklessly. Having no luck at cards, he went over to the roulette table and placed a hundred *bolivars* on a number. On an honest wheel, such as Pasqual Tomás ran for the amusement of his guests, Newt had found he almost always won by the use of a certain cautious "system," but tonight he played with abandon.

He noticed this same abandon in the music of the marimba band. Some of the dancers, inspired by the change of beat, had turned from the tango to the more lively bolero.

Having quickly lost two thousand *bolivars*, Bradford remembered, too late, that he needed all his ready cash for a business deal he hoped to swing tomorrow. He was angling for a concession in a large tract of carnauba palms. He needed more resin and tallow to keep his varnish factory going, not to mention the candle makers in town with whom he had a contract.

The remark of a mining engineer who passed the roulette table made him think of these candlemakers now. "That monk is just what you need for your business, Newt," the man said. "He gave his warning in all the bars and cantinas before he came here, and the whole town's excited."

"What's that got to do with my business?"

"Why, there's a big run on that candlemaker's shop next to the cathedral. The superstitious ones all want to light a candle to their special saints."

Bradford went into the dining-room for a drink. Several Americans were here and instead of drinking coffee flavored with Don Pasqual's precious fundador, they had all shifted to highballs. It was in line with the general change in the mood of the party.

"Feeling like a little smile, Newt?"

Bradford turned to see the American consul, a pale squinting man who exported gums, fine feathers and sisal. It occurred to Newt that Rod Sandeman had been following him around all evening as if hoping to get a chance to talk to him in private. Possibly he wanted a loan, for his exporting business had gone to pot since the war.

"Now you got the right slant on getting rich, Newt," the consul said. "There'll be lots of young fellows like you coming down from the States after the war. Got to hand it to you. You come to South America almost broke, get some balm tappers, sell some wax to a candle shop, and in two years you own a factory!"

WHEN a servant brought the highballs the consul held up his glass and gave Bradford a myopic stare, as if measuring him from his blond curly hair down the six-foot length of his lanky body. "You aren't leaving town, Newt?"

"What gives you that idea?"

"The expression on your face when that monk spouted his prophecy."

"What were you watching my face for?"

"I was watching everyone's face. That monk started something. He turned the clock back half a century. Everybody's gone nuts. They're even talking of leaving town!"

"I'm not leaving town without your permission, Rod. I know my draft status. If that's what's worrying you."

A frightened *señorita* came up to the consul. "Is this true, Señor Sandeman, this thing about the volcano?"

"You South Americans know more about volcanoes than I do," Rod Sandeman laughed.

"Of course it isn't true, *señorita*," Newt said. She was a sparkling-eyed bird of a girl with a flower shawl half draped over golden shoulders. "How about this rumba?" he asked.

"But, Newt, just a minute—I—" the consul began.

"Yes, why not rumba?" the girl said, snapping her fan shut. She put her warm arm around Newt's shoulder—not exactly the orthodox position for a rumba, but this girl was obviously frightened and wanted someone to cling to. "Yes, why not dance," she said, "while there is yet time? For there may not be a *mañana*—"

Bradford did not listen to the rest of it, for he was watching the consul, who was watching him.

"I've had two proposals tonight," the girl chattered on. "One suitor waited long

enough to ask the *dueña*. The other—when the monk left—came straight to me. The monk has made all the men brave"—she laughed—"and all the women desperate."

Newt felt very brave himself, all of a sudden. "Does it conform," he asked, "that we go out to the balcony where we can see Mount Quilado against the stars? We can see if there is any smoke over the caldera."

"Tonight it conforms," she said. "For *mañana*—"

They went out on the balcony that overlooked the plaza. There were several other couples here among the potted flowers. Newt saw an American pipe-line man from Houston making love to the wife of a coffee concessionaire. It was a dangerous game that neither would have played except for this growing recklessness in the air.

Newt found himself holding the *señorita's* hand tightly as they stared across the plaza and the white towers of the mission towards the foothills of the Andes. Midway on this uptilted landscape between the white-washed adobes of San Justo and the cordillera the great volcanic cone lifted against the Southern Cross. Even these philandering couples in the shadows of the balcony looked in that direction as if waiting for the change of destiny that might come any moment to all of them. Not one actually believed there would be an eruption, but they all knew of the horror of two generations ago. It was a horror that San Justo had never really shaken off.

A man brushed by Bradford, shoving him almost off balance against the girl. He must have been very excited not to apologize, for in San Justo, especially in Don Pasqual's house, everyone was gracious. Newt said nothing, although to his astonishment he almost swung his fist. Everyone's nerves, he realized, were on edge.

THE girl gave a nervous titter, opened her fan and whispered, "That is one who proposed to me. He is not a guest but came on an affair of business and Don Pasqual asked him to stay and have some wine. A bad *hombre, señor!*"

This time, as the man turned, Newt saw his blue jaw and pomaded hair, black and straight as a horse's mane. Bradford knew him—Bucho Blake, an Irish-Italian who owned the local bottling works, the taxi-cab concession and a dozen shadier sources of income.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Bradford?" He grinned. "O.K. So I did it on purpose. Want an apology?"

"*Si, señor,*" the girl said, squeezing Newt's arm. "Demand the apology."

"Not here," Bradford said. "Not in Don Pasqual's house. Just forget it."

"Oh, so you're backing down?"

"Bucho!" the *señorita* burst out. "I refused your proposal of marriage, and yet you get jealous that I come out here unchaperoned! Go away! You make me sick!"

"Don't change the subject," Blake said. "This bird picks a fight and then tells me, forget it."

"Then we won't forget. Suppose we remember it over in Tio Wilson's cantina," Newt said. "Not here."

"Check. That's swell. I'll be there waiting for you."

"Why waste this night at a dive like Tio Wilson's?" the girl said as Blake stalked off. "Why can't we dance until morning? Or perhaps, since there may not be a morning, we can dance forever!"

"Forever!" another woman's voice echoed to her lover somewhere in the dark.

It was at that moment that the mosaic floor of the balcony gave a slight, almost imperceptible jolt. It came almost simultaneously with a distant boom from the direction of Quilado. The sound was so muffled that it seemed to vibrate not in the air but in the ground.

The marimba players had not heard it, nor had the dancers, for the revelry went on. But someone on the balcony said voicelessly, "Retumbo!"

It might have been a retumbo, Newt reflected, holding the terrified girl tightly. Certainly it fitted the description of those underground roarings which were supposed to herald a volcanic eruption.

Couples darted from the shadows of hanging ferns, separated, ran in to the ballroom. They reported the sound—greatly exaggerated—and the dancing

stopped. Guests and orchestra poured out on the balcony to look towards the cordillera and the great cone.

Everyone chattered. What was the sound like? Everyone had a different version, for it could not be accurately described. And that made it all the more terrifying, for "underground roarings" were supposed to be just like that—indescribable.

It could have been a landslide on the mountain road, someone said, or a slight earthquake. But others who had been on the balcony objected. Not an earthquake, it was too sharp and sudden. Still another said it was anything but sharp, it was dull and indefinite—"something you could feel in your bones."

Newt said, "It might have been a truck passing the patio gate behind the house."

"True!" One of the marimba players agreed. "A truck sometimes will make the walls shake, for this house is built with an interlining of wattle as a protection against temblors."

The balcony was jammed now, and so was the plaza below, for everyone had run out of the moving-picture adobe and the gaming-houses and saloons across from the mission church.

"It was a truck, or some *dynamiteros* at the mica mines," Newt repeated, trying to calm the terrified girl who clung to him. He was relieved when she called out suddenly, breathlessly, "*Mamita!*" and ran through the crowd to her mother's arms.

With a complete break of the nervous tension, now that the girl was no longer at his side inviting trouble, Newt wandered into the dining room for another whiskey and soda. He heard several old *ricos* telling their wives to collect their sons and daughters. "If there is to be an evacuation it will be necessary to make preparations."

A *dueña* said, "There is Don Pasqual now. We must say good night and explain why we are going home."

DON PASQUAL stood in the center of a jabbering group of guests. Head and shoulders above them, he was majestic and cool, although for the first time in Newt's memory the silvery hair was rumpled over his polished-leather forehead. He was talking to a stubby ox of a man who, in the presence of the towering *don*, was totally inconspicuous. This was no other than the *alcalde*, the mayor of San Justo.

All the guests in the house crowded on the dance floor, alarmed that the affair of the monk had been considered important enough to summon the Alcalde of the City!

"There must be no panic, *amigos*," he said, stepping up among the marimba players to increase his height. "Somehow panic is spreading in the cantinas, but I have news that will put a stop to it. I have telegraphed to the meteorological staff at San Filipe and they pronounce the report of volcanic activity at Mount Quilado to be a sheer lunacy. Quilado is dormant if not extinct! As for this so-called monk, I inquired from the tile makers at the Dominican mission and they say that he is no monk at all but a *liberé* from Devil's Island who is a Vichyite and opposed to this war and likewise opposed to God. He is, they say, no better than a witch doctor and utterly mad as well as malicious."

But the very fact that the *alcalde* had gone to the trouble of all this investigation showed how much that "monk" had worried him. Several guests called out, "But there was a retumbo! Many felt it! Many heard it!"

The *alcalde* put up his brown thick hand. "I was coming to that. Many of you do not know that I have sent the constabulary to search for a band of fugitives—some Integralistas and Germans who have fled Brazil and are hiding in the foothills of the Cordillera—"

"But the retumbo! The retumbo!"

"The constabulary detachment just now sent a message by wireless that these desperados blew up the bridge on the Mount Quilado road! Thus they escaped the constabulary—and thus unknowingly they have thrown my town into a panic! It was the sabotaging of the bridge which you mistook for a retumbo."

The guests began slowly to laugh. They broke out like a jungle of happy birds, chattering and whistling. They drank. They called for the marimba band to celebrate!

It was a hectic scene—the abrupt

change from despair to revelry. Now they were dancing something that looked very much like the Martinique beguin. Despite himself, Newt felt the contagion of this false hilarity. "The prophecy of the volcano is a hoax," he said to himself, "but this nervous laughter is real." It was a hangover from the thrill and fright the monk had given them—a hangover in everyone's head, in everyone's imagination going back to that horror of '78.

What if tonight were really like that night in '78! Newt thought as everyone else was thinking. What if everyone in this ballroom, in the gaming-room, in the whole house, the whole town had only a few more hours to live? What if not a single one of these vivid, living, laughing *señoritas* or their partners were left to tell the tale!

"THAT monk certainly started something," Newt said to the consul who was standing beside him with a highball.

Don Pasqual, wiping his forehead, had come to join them. He took a sip of his Amontillado. "Yes, the monk!" he said in ill-suppressed rage. "He started it! You could see the *pobres* out there in the streets. When the *alcalde* talked to his captain of constabulary he told him to come home with the detachment immediately, lest we have a general panic!"

"That gives me the idea," Newt said, "that the monk's prophecy and the blowing up of the bridge might be two parts of the same plot."

The consul and the old *don* stared at him. "A plot? Yes, there might be a plot. Surely. But how? What manner of plot?"

"Some fifth-column work," Newt said. "I'll bet you anything my *obreros* will all get drunk tonight. We'll have labor troubles tomorrow. Nobody will work. These Nazis always pull that trick—destroying morale. Look what you've had to do already: call back the constabulary that was chasing them."

"Newt's got an idea there," the consul said.

"The monk, true enough, has been frightening the people of the savannas and sugar country," Don Pasqual agreed. "And now it is the people of the centers! The *alcalde* must attend to this!" The *don* raised his fists, his serene face darkening. "He will throw that monk into the *caliboza*. He will put *grillos* on his feet!" He turned for the front veranda, swearing softly. "*Madre de dios!* Yes! It is a plot!"

"Did you fight Bucho?" a voice tinkled in Newt's ear. "Did you kill him?"

He looked down at the bright hot eyes of the *señorita*. "No, not yet, I—" He was about to tell the truth, that he had forgotten all about that footling brawl. But he noticed that several other *señoritas* had gathered around him with their partners—young Creoles and *ricos* of the town. They all wanted excitement tonight!

"This Bucho Blake is a rascal and a bully," one of the young *ricos* said. "A bootlegger from the States, is it not, *señor*?"

Another said, "A bad *hombre, señor*, this Bucho. Too tough for the States so he comes to bully us here in San Justo. Show him how tough we are, Señor Bradford. He is waiting for you at Tio Wilson's cantina!"

"But he is a bad *hombre*," a *señorita* said. "He will have some Mixco Indian knife you or break your head. Please do not go, *señor*—unless it is a matter of honor!"

Newt had not considered a fist fight with the thug Bucho a matter of honor exactly, but these young friends seemed to have made it one. There was no getting out of it now. Nor did he want to get out of it. He was in the mood for a fight. Like everyone else who could not shake off that fear of a great and final catastrophe coming, he was in the mood to do something rash.

Without saying good night to the *don*, since he intended to return, he went to meet Bucho at the place they had agreed upon—Tio Wilson's cantina.

CHAPTER II

SHOOT-OUT

AS HE crossed the plaza Newt felt the excitement rising in the town. The *alcalde* had failed completely to quiet his citizens. His efforts actually had focused their minds on the volcano instead of making

them forget it. For example, he had hired some barefooted boys to march around the plaza bearing placards.

MOUNT QUILADO QUIET. REPORT OF COMING ERUPTION UNTRUE.

This resulted in a very common phenomenon of mass psychology. The very denial of the possibility proved it existed. The whole plaza, Newt noticed, was a stage for the reenactment of the scene in Don Pasqual's house. Fear, now that the cause of it was denied, took the form of hilarity. Or rather of a growing abandon.

There was heavy betting at the cockfight. Open-air night clubs turned noisy. San Justo started to drink heavily—a rare thing. The street peddlers found a brisk market for stucco saints and for those folded red and purple papers on which fortunes are printed. But, curiously enough, the street vendors found a falling off in the sale of lottery tickets.

"Drawing number seven! Municipality of San Justo!" Newt heard one old vendor calling. "Here is the next—your number, *señor,* 00-507, March seventh!"

"What is it worth" a man on the street cackled, "if there is no such date in this world?"

Newt had the same feeling about a lottery. He felt like taking a big gamble tonight, but he wanted the returns now, not *mañana!*

He went into Tio Wilson's cantina. Since the death of Tio Wilson the new management had installed some mechanism in the once honest wheel, hired new and cleverer dealers for the games and sent to the Canal Zone for a half dozen American hostesses. One of these had already arrived, Newt noticed with pleasure and excitement.

"A knock-out, too," he said to himself as she came to the bar at his elbow and asked if he would like to sit down with his drink. Her skin was without the pallor of the tropics and her eyes were bright under lashes that certainly needed no mascara. "And that blue on her lids isn't paint, or else I'm excited and seeing things in a different color tonight," Newt said to himself. She was a breath of the States here in the humid heat and the rotting rain forests of the Orinoco.

Everyone was going crazy tonight. Here was he, Newt Bradford, falling in love with a hostess in a third class dive. "But," he thought, as she came to the table with him, "I would have fallen in love with her any other time—and anywhere!"

"Will you have a drink?" he said. "I'm in luck getting the only hostess here."

She sat down at the slate-top table. "I've been wanting to talk to somebody from back home." That was what they all said. He had heard it regularly when he was a "blue moon king" in the Canal Zone, buying blue drinks for hostesses. "You're the only one from the States I've seen since I came here," she went on, "except for that gorilla." She noddded to a table in the corner where Bucho Blake had just taken a seat. Obviously Bucho had found it necessary to wait until Newt had finished his tête-à-tête with the girl.

Newt had no more interest in the fight. In fact if this girl had not called his attention to Bucho he would have forgotten it altogether.

"How did they get a girl like you to come down here?" he asked.

"That was simple. That head waiter who's the new manager sent me a cablegram. My name's Luella. Yours is Bradford, isn't it?"

"How do you know? You never saw me before. If you'd seen me I'd have seen you and remembered it. Even at a distance."

"Somebody told that man over there when you came in—" Again she nodded to Bucho. "It was the bartender who hold him. They'd been talking about you. That man with the thick neck was worried. He asked if you knew how to shoot. All Americans can shoot, the bartender said. Only you shoot ten times better than any of them."

"So it's a shoot-out Bucho wants," Newt grunted. "That'll make it simpler."

"If you're so good, why aren't you in the Army?"

"I prefer the Marines." He took a long look at her to see if she really wanted to know. "I went down to Surinam to join up. A lot of Marines are down there guarding the bauxite mines. I thought it was all fixed, but there was some technicality about my reporting to the consul. I'm waiting for the consul's next play."

SHE was not listening. Although it was the truth, perhaps she thought it was only an alibi. She said finally, "But you want to get in? Since you're such a gunfighter?"

He asked, nettled, "Are you recruiting fighters for the war, or what?"

"I'm recruiting just one."

"I'm your man."

"Don't you want to think it over? Don't you want to know more about me?"

"Just one thing. Are you married?"

"So you're going to make love to me?"

"Not here. Not with Bucho scowling at us. Let's go to that night club across the plaza and have a dance together—"

"That would give you at least twenty minutes to find out who I am. I'll tell you in one. No, I'm not married. As for the rest: when my father was sick his head waiter cabled to New Orleans for me to come. Dad had one of these fevers—a paludian fever they say you get on the Orinoco from the mud. He wanted to get another rubber concession, not run a cantina. That's why he came to South America. He got this cantina in payment of a debt." Her voice softened. "It took me forever to get here. I was too late."

"You came because your father was dying? Then your Dad was Tio Wilson! I'm sorry. He was a swell friend, made me wish I could go back to the States every time I talked to him!"

"When *are* you going back?"

"Well, we could go together. On the same boat. In the same cabin—if we got married first."

"Is everyone as mad as you are tonight?"

"Yes, everyone. Which reminds me." He got up. "Wait till I finish with Bucho and we'll talk it over."

As he walked to Blake's booth Rod Sandeman, the U. S. consul, got up from the table and almost bumped into him.

"You don't happen to be shadowing me, Rod?" Bradford said with a long-lipped grin.

"Well, to be frank, Newt, I—that is, of course—I've been putting it off, this little matter I wanted to take up with you. The last time I started talking to you you went off dancing."

Newt noticed a *sargento* of the local police in green coat and duck pants talking to Bucho. Blake shrugged his beefy shoulders, got up and walked out.

On the other side of Newt a second policeman stood waiting.

Bradford said, "Why not wait till tomorrow, Rod? I'll call at your office."

"Tomorrow might be too late." Evidently the myopic consul had been affected by the mass mania of the town. Matters that habitually had been put off "until *mañana*" were now being settled without further thought or delay.

"All right, get it off your chest, Rod." Newt glanced over his shoulder at the girl. She had left her table and thrown a fringed shawl over her shoulders. A blossom of translucent shell in her brown hair made her gorgeous. Newt gazed at her longingly, with a sudden instinctive fear that he had found her too late. Her enormous eyes, staring at those policemen coming up on either side of him showed that the same fear had gripped her—and at the same moment.

The consul said, "You are under arrest, Newt."

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"It's been a week now and I haven't had the heart to do this. But tonight—well, with all this excitement, I just couldn't put it off."

"Yes, I know. That monk scared us all into thinking tonight's the end of everything. We've got to settle our accounts."

"You see, Newt—that is, I can't call you Newt any more. I'll have to come right out with it and call you by your real name—Bill Moran. It was your fingerprints that caught you when you tried to enlist with the Marines in Surinam."

IN THE *caliboza* behind the Municipal Building a prisoner called from his cell, "Is it possible that Señor Bradford has been drinking like other *Norteamericanos* so that you lock him with us for the night?"

"It is not a matter of drunkenness but of extradition," a sentry in frayed blue jeans answered. "A murder committed in the States has borne fruit. He will be taken to Caracas in the morning."

"Ah, Señor Bradford!" another prisoner called through the bars to the cell next to him. "In the morning—so says the jailer. But according to the monk who is in prison with us, there will be no morning!"

Through the barred window of his cell Newt could see the usual crowd that hangs around a jail—the sweethearts and wives of the prisoners, the friends who wanted to arrange bail, the smugglers of rum, and the peddlers of cigars and banana beer and lottery tickets. The crowd was actually light-hearted—even the wives. For a rumor had started that all the prisoners were to be freed before morning, except of course the felons, who would be taken to Caracas. Why keep men locked up when a river of lava might drown them?

The fiesta air had even spread among the cells. There was much drinking of rum and *guarapo*. There was yelling and plucking at guitars. Newt himself had a bottle of whiskey.

It was the sentry in blue jeans who had thrust the bottle through the bars, saying, "It is from Don Pasqual who sends it with *felicidados*. It is not for the prisoner, Bill Moran, but for the other man in the same body, named Newt Bradford."

"Tell the *don* he is the best friend an *Americano* ever had."

"You have been a good citizen among us, Señor Bradford. But murder is murder. And extradition is as hard as the *grillos* we used to weld on the feet of political prisoners. Is there something I can do, *señor*, in this hour of your tragedy?"

"Get me a fan. It's stifling hot in here."

The only fan in the *caliboza* was an electric contrivance the size of an airplane propeller in the *sargento's* office. It served to stir the dank air a few feet down the corridor of cells. Elsewhere the Orinoco heat hung like a damp blanket.

"The *sargento* already has ordered a connection from the hardware store so that a fan may be installed in this cell, *señor*. Is there something else you want?"

"I want to know if there's anything to this talk about freeing the prisoners."

The jailer said sadly, "Not a shred of truth, *señor*. It is a fabrication, due to this rumor of the volcano. But the authorities have conclusive proof that the eruption was also a fabrication and a plot. The monk has confessed."

Newt remembered passing the monk's cell on the way to his own. The fellow lay in a grass hammock, a shapeless heap of brown rags with a face like the tinted brown wax of the candles sold at the mission. Lantern flies hovered over him, one crawling down the long fleshless nose without bringing the slightest twitch. Others hovered over the sandaled feet. In that moment's glance Newt had seen the bony ankles scarred by the fetters of Devil's Island.

"What did you do to make the monk confess?" Newt asked.

"Nothing. The *alcalde* will not allow torture. But the *alcalde*, though of short stature, frightened the truth out. The monk was a Vichyite and collaborationist. He harbored these Nazis and led them to a hiding-place."

"A good Nazi trick," Newt remarked, "using a volcano to throw this whole countryside into a panic. It's not my funeral, but why don't you make the monk tell you where these rats are hiding?"

"A very good suggestion, *señor*. Except that the monk is dead. His heart, it seems, was not strong."

A street vendor was singing out to the crowd near Newt's cell. "More news of the volcano! It comes from the god-birds chirping to a parrot!" This vendor was a good speiler, for Newt, glancing through his cell window, saw the sidewalk crowd turn to listen. "There will be an eruption before morning! Let everyone congregate. I have banana beer for sale, and frijoles!"

Thus the German propaganda, like a pestilence, was spread even by an innocent peddler.

Newt yelled through the window. "You are spreading poison with your frijoles, *hombre!* You are helping the Germans!"

He stopped shouting when he saw a white girl with a shell blossom in her hair coming through the crowd.

WHEN the *sargento* shuffled down the corridor a few minutes later Newt heard him saying, "It would be better if it serves the *señorita* to talk to him in the

cell. In most cases I call the prisoners out to talk to their sweethearts. But in this matter of extradition—"

They were at the door of his cell now and Newt found himself clutching the bars with both hands like any prisoner eager to get close to what he loves most in the outside world. The very sight of the girl's bright brown hair in the gloom of the corridor gave him a lift.

"The consul came right back and told me," Luella said.

"That was white of him." Newt saw her glance at the *sargento,* who discreetly bowed himself away. Then she glanced anxiously at the next cell. "Don't mind that Guarauno. He can't understand English. Go ahead and talk to me as if we were alone in the world."

She gripped the bars in the same way, one of her hands touching his. "I came to ask if I could—" she began, but then switched. "I thought you'd like to talk to someone from home."

"Sure. That's what I want to talk about! I'll be back there again. Frisco, Fisherman's Wharf, the Embarcadero, the Golden Gate. They'll take me back to the places I see every time I dream. I've even dreamed I'd go back this way—a fugitive from justice, wanted for murder. Rod Sandeman didn't tell you that?"

She said in a low voice, "I heard these policemen say it. But," she added, "it couldn't have been murder! Unless you're taking the blame for someone else. Is that it?"

"That would make it romantic, wouldn't it? Pretty stale romance at that. No. I committed the murder myself—a real one. It wasn't a mistake, either. It was premeditated and I got a life sentence. Otherwise I wouldn't have escaped to South America. I love the States too much."

She stared at him through the bars, her eyes two burning spots. "If that's true—"

"It's God's truth. So if you came here thinking you'd hear a story of sacrifice and innocence—"

"I came for another reason altogether," she interrupted. "This murder you're talking about, was it what they call a shoot-out?"

"What's that got to do with it? Yes, it was. The other fellow—the man I killed—had a gun, and he was a good shot."

"But you were better. It's just what Bucho and the bartender said about you. All *Americanos* can shoot, they said, only you're ten times better than the average."

NEWT scowled. She did not seem to care what his crime was, except in so far as it concerned his markmanship! But he stuck to the point. "A friend of mine was being persecuted and he came to me and told me about it. He'd been a member of a German-American bund and he wanted to quit when he saw what they were up to. They ordered him on some sabotage job and when Carl refused they threatened, even tortured him. Carl Nachtrieb was my friend's name. It was the horror of the Gestapo right in Frisco!"

"Why didn't you call in the F.B.I.?"

"I couldn't. Carl's mother and sister were in Germany. The Gestapo would be notified to take care of them if Carl didn't play ball. So I decided to leave Carl out of it, because of his folks in Munich, and go after these thugs on my own. One drew a gun and started shooting it out with me. I killed him. The others just lifted their hands and said they would confess everything and go with me to the F.B.I. But I'd been hit during the shoot-out, and they got away."

"But still, I can't see why the authorities didn't thank you for what you did."

"Because the man I killed wasn't a German at all. He was just their hired trigger-man. He had no German connections and the F.B.I. had no dope on him. It looked like a plain gunfight between two Irish-Americans—with me the aggressor, since I'd gone to the house armed."

"And the real Germans—"

"Skipped out and left me holding the bag. I tried to describe them. I said my friend Carl could describe them, help trace them. He doublecrossed me, was afraid to squeal on them. He said he knew nothing about this 'persecution' I was talking about. It made me out a swell liar—which was the only way the F.B.I. could look at it. Carl was still scared to death about his mother and sister in Germany."

"So he sacrificed his friend instead?"

"Maybe I'd have done the same thing in the same spot."

"He was a rat."

"Not a complete rat. He spent every last cent he had in helping me escape from the pen. I think I'd do it all over again."

Luella studied Newt's face and then said, "I've been looking for a man like you. I don't think you'll be afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"It's about some more Nazi fifth columnists, so I'm not changing the subject. My dad hated them, the same as you do. He used to hear a lot over at his cantina about what's going on. Gun-running, smuggling, fugitives from the States like you—he would hear them talking. Generally what he heard went in one ear and out the other."

"That's why he was a success in San Justo," Brandon commented.

"But he heard something that didn't go out the other ear. That gang of Germans that came out of Brazil—he's been supplying them with quinine and rum."

Newt whistled softly. "Tio Wilson! I guess he was a very sick man at the end."

"No, he wasn't sick then. It's been going on for a long time. These Germans have been sabotaging labor—especially Indian rubber collectors. Dad's money was in a syndicate that went broke because they couldn't get workers. His last wish, his head waiter told me, was to have those Germans caught."

"If he supplied them with rum that ought to be easy."

"No. We don't know where they are. A Mixco Indian takes the stuff out to them. Dad tried to have him trailed, but all we know is he just packs the stuff on a mule and goes west into the jungle."

"Somewhere between here and the Andes." Newt laughed. "All you got to do now is send an expedition up one of the Orinoco branches—the Cinaruco or Portuguesa or Guanare. I could name at least fifty. Why don't you ask a fortune teller?" he said dryly.

"You're the fortune teller."

He did not understand what she meant at first. "All joking aside, when is this muleteer taking them some more rum and quinine?"

"Tonight."

As he saw the excitement in her eyes, Newt gradually began to smile. "So you want me to trail him?"

"Why not?"

CHAPTER III

THE SONNET OF JOSÉ PEPÉ

LUELLA left the San Justo jail and went to the dance at Don Pasqual's. It was the logical first step to take to get Newt out of jail.

Before leaving the *caliboza* she had asked Newt, "Who's your best friend in this town?"

"So you're going to do something rash too?" he laughed. "You want me to send you to somebody you can persuade to get me out of jail. But making eyes at some politico might get you into a jam. All right, go see the old padre at the Dominican tile factory. He'll help." He added, while she was making up her lips, "And he doesn't like women to paint, you might like to know."

"You're wasting time with such talk," she said. "That muleteer is over at Dad's cantina right now. He always starts for the jungle as soon as the town is dark and the night clubs close. You've got to get out of here in time."

"That brings up another point. If no one's been able to track this muleteer, how do you expect me to?"

"If he knows you're a fugitive from the States and that you broke out of this jail, he'll think you're fleeing to the jungle, won't he?"

"I get it! In other words, I'm the one man in this town he won't suspect."

"That's just what I'm going to tell your best friend—when you get around to letting me know who he is. I'm going to tell the whole truth. But I want to know someone I can trust."

Newt said readily, "My best friend is Don Pasqual Tomás. I saved his son from a drunk Carib once. He'll do anything for me. Maybe he can talk to the *alcalde*. You can trust him, too, but you'll find him a pretty hard customer to convince."

"I'll talk to them both."

Newt watched at his cell window as the girl went through the sidewalk crowd. It was not a propitious time to approach the *alcalde* about freeing a prisoner held for murder. What with his town in a growing panic, the *alcalde* had troubles enough

already. Newt was sure he would brush the matter aside until *mañana*—especially as time dragged on. It was ten o'clock when the *sargento* came down the corridor.

"This is what comes of being a man of integrity, *señor*," the *sargento* said. "Your friends believe in you!" He unlocked the cell and led the prisoner to a vaulted ante-

"You realize that this letter will ruin you," the alcalde *said to Don Pasqual.*

room at the extreme end of the corridor.

Three people sat on the *saguan* bench facing Newt as he entered. Luella had brought not only the princely old *don* but also his opposite—the tough-fibered dictator of this whole district—the *alcalde* of San Justo.

Studying the prisoner with his smart, beady eyes, the *alcalde* said, "Your friends have asked me to free you for a few days, but they seem to forget that the consul of your country delivered you into my hands for safe keeping. You are an escaped criminal—"

Don Pasqual objected hotly. Judging from his haggard, tragic face the old patrician had taken to heart this news that an *Americano* whom he loved had been jailed as a murderer. "He is not a criminal! He had a fair man-to-man gunfight with an enemy, a duel—that much the consul admits."

The *alcalde* scratched his bulldog jowl with a steady rasp. "If we let him out, how is he going to find where these German saboteurs are hiding? The muleteer you speak of has let no one else track him."

Luella answered this question. "It's got to look as if Newt had broken out of jail. He is to come straight to the cantina as if for help—"

"And that will look genuine," the *don* put in, "for will not any fugitive go first to his wife or his sweetheart for help?"

"This muleteer," Luella went on, "is like any henchman and spy for a bandit gang. The head waiter told me how he hangs around the bar picking up news. He'll hear about Newt Bradford breaking out of jail. We'll arrange it so that he sees Newt out in the patio rustling his mule."

"Then I proposition him, offer him a good reward for smuggling me out of town," Newt said.

THE *alcalde* kept his eyes on the prisoner. "I see. Perhaps. He smuggles you out of town, let us say, wrapped up in a sack on his mule. But why argue from this that he will smuggle you into the German camp?"

"Leave that part to me," Newt said.

The *alcalde* studied him through puffs of smoke. "Yes. You are a big man, *señor*, with fine shoulders. And you shoot well, I have heard. But then what?"

"What do you mean, then what?"

"He means you've got to come back to jail, Newtito," Don Pasqual said. "We are cutting tape in doing this, because of the war. We must catch those Nazis and Integralistas. If you help us, it will help you when they take you to the States. But after you have found the Nazis, you must come back to jail."

Newt said quietly, "I figured it that way."

A grin stretched the *alcalde's* mouth. They all saw it. "The plan is logical," he said, "except for what you *Norteamericanos* call the joker. Why do you think a man would come back to face a life sentence in prison?"

Don Pasqual's gentle voice could turn to a bellow when he was angry. "It is an insult! An outrage to even mention the doubt! I vouch for him! If there is blame, let it fall on my shoulders. I myself shall be his hostage. I shall remain in this very jail a prisoner—"

"And tomorrow when the consul asks for him," the *alcalde* laughed, "shall I tell him, 'No, Señor Consul. The prisoner is escaped, but I have an old Venezuelan gentleman for you instead. Take him to the States and imprison him as a hostage.'" The *alcalde* guffawed, "Is this Germany that you talk such nonsense?"

Luella said, "Then I'll go on his bond. How much money do you want?"

It was not the thing to say to this *alcalde* who had never taken a bribe in his whole political career. "Señorita," he said gruffly, "in this matter of extradition there is of course no bail. Even if you offered me a rubber plantation I could not set bail. But," he added slowly, "we must catch these Nazis."

They waited breathlessly.

"I have my family, my children, my parents to support. If this prisoner does not come back, I would be politically ruined." The *alcalde* shook his head. "But there is this suggestion of a hostage."

"*Bueno!*" the *don* said triumphantly. "I am your prisoner!"

"Saint of my name, not so fast!" the *alcalde* objected. "If you take the blame, if you admit that you entered this jail and smuggled some tools to the prisoner with which to break out of his cell, if you admit that you bribed certain unnamed accomplices to aid his escape—"

"I will do all this gladly!" Don Pasqual said.

"Write it down," the *alcalde* said, "and post-date the confession."

The *sargento* was called in: The writing materials were brought.

"You realize, Don Pasqual, that this letter will ruin you," the *alcalde* said. "You will actually be sentenced, in process of law, to a prison term?"

The *don* wrote, not listening.

Newt was staring at the *alcalde*, aghast. "Look here!" he burst out. "What would you gain, putting Don Pasqual in jail?"

"Nothing," the *alcalde* said truthfully. "Nevertheless, I have a motive. Since Don Pasqual must go to prison in case you run away there is no more doubt in my mind. You will, of course, come back."

Don Pasqual, having finished writing his "confession," turned to the prisoner. "You have some money, Newtito, so you can bribe this muleteer? It must be convincing. No monkey money."

"I lost all my ready cash at your wheel tonight," Newt grinned.

Luella opened her purse. It was a cayman-hide bag which she had chosen to-

"This muleteer—he is not going tonight—he is afraid of the volcano!"

night for a definite purpose. She took out a roll of bills of various denomination and handed them to Bradford.

"So that is what you thought to bribe me with!" the *alcalde* chuckled. "When the muleteer and this Nazi crew are taken prisoner you will get the money back, I promise you."

The *sargento* of police who was now a party to the whole plot, said, "I have a map of the Orinoco and the Brazilian border which I keep on hand lest a fugitive breaks out of this jail. For this quest, Señor Bradford, the map is yours."

The prisoner said, "And how about a gun?"

"I will supply that also," the *sargento* offered. "And when, *señores,* shall this prisoner be liberated?"

Don Pasqual and Newt both turned to the girl for her answer. "You'd better be at the cantina at eleven," she said.

"I'll be there on the dot."

The *alcalde* folded the piece of paper which would send Don Pasqual to prison if Newt did not keep his word. There was admiration in the politico's beady eyes as he looked at the old patrician. "I will tear this paper up, needless to say, Don Pasqual, when the prisoner returns. Although it should be inscribed first on our tablet of heroic deeds in the plaza!"

But as he got up and lit a *cigarillo* the *alcalde* said half aloud, "A gun, a map, a bag of money—to an escaped murderer! Has everyone gone stark mad tonight?"

AFTER his liberation, which consisted merely of walking out of the *caliboza's* back door, Newt passed a wool storage plant and slipped into a curio shop. It was open at this late hour, for the iron gratings padlocked at night over many shops had been removed because of the spending spree.

José Pepé, the proprietor, sold wax cherubs, copal dolls and sometimes poems of his own writing. Politically he was always on the side opposed to the Legitimistas.

"Welcome, *señor,* my friend!" he said, grabbing Newt's arm and leading him quickly into the lean-to bedroom behind his shop. "A taxicab will come in good time to take you to Tio Wilson's. What a lunacy this is—taking a taxicab for just around the plaza!"

"The plaza looks like noon on a market day," Newt reminded him. "They won't see me inside a taxi."

"Nevertheless"—José Pepé gave a bird-like wink— "I do not believe it, that you are taking a taxi to Tio Wilson's. I believe you are a wise man, *amigo.* You are riding off to the jungle."

"Perhaps you don't know everything."

"I know something plenty. The *sargento* told me I must hide you in my shop until the news of your escape is spread and a certain muleteer hears of it. I also know something, Señor Newtito, that you do not know. This muleteer like everyone else in town is panic-stricken about the prophecy. He is afraid to go westward to the jungles, for westward is Mount Quilado!"

It took Newt a moment to grasp the import of this. "You mean he's not going tonight!" He sank to a chair. "That queers the whole game! I might as well go back to jail."

José Pepé's parrot eyes blinked. "Back—to jail! Santa Maria del Rio!" he gasped. "Why, I thought this quest you were to go on is a bargain in which you gain your

freedom. Through no fault of yours the quest is proved impossible."

"They made the bargain knowing I'd go back."

"Newtito, you are a friend of mine. You have listened to me read my poems. Listen this time to a pearl of wisdom. My kinsman, the *sargento,* heard the consul say you would have no chance if you are sent back a prisoner to the States. You will die in prison. The consul says you struck a guard when you escaped from the penitentiary. You can never expect a commutation, so said the consul. That is why he did not arrest you until after much thought and heartbreak."

"So Rod Sandeman said that!"

José Pepé let his words sink in while he beat up a cup of chocolate. Then turning suddenly, "Newtito! This taximan who is coming, he is a good fellow. He will show much compassion for a fugitive from this jail—I have seen him almost shed tears, for a bribe is to him like onions. If the bribe is sufficient he will even hide you in his hillside pueblo for a necessary time. So far, *bueno.* Then a brother-in-law of mine who is with the Brazil Boundary Commission— Are you listening to me, Newtito?"

"Yes, what were you saying, José Pepé?"

"Now I write a letter to my brother-in-law. It will be—what you call it—like a passport. He will get you into Brazil." José Pepé took a pad of ruled paper which he had handy for the writing of his poems. Newt watched, fascinated at the beautiful script and flourishes drawn by the stub of a red pencil. "My brother-in-law has connections—'people of the centers.' You will get work—a sugar master, a coffee taster, why not? You get along well with South Americans. We all love you. Why not build yourself a new career, comfort, perhaps riches, rather than prison for life?"

He handed the "passport" to Brazil across the table. "There, Newtito *mio!* My greatest sonnet!"

IN AN upstairs room of Tio Wilson's cantina Luella watched the clock. From the window she could also watch the patio and a mule with a fiber nosebag, tethered at the gate.

Responding to an excited knock, she opened the thick *saguan* door and saw the head waiter standing there, twisting his hands. He was a dark little man, half Greek, always in the same tuxedo, always needing a shave. He hated the Nazis and had a perfect name for them. They were, he said, like these flies in Venezuela called *gusanas* which laid eggs in their own bites!

"This muleteer, *señorita!* He is not going tonight. He is afraid of the volcano!"

Luella asked logically, "How can he be afraid when it's his own gang that started the volcano story?"

"He is only an Indian who takes supplies to them. They would not let him in their palavers and plots."

"Tell him to come up here."

When the muleteer was brought Luella noticed that he had an honest, although very stupid face. He had high cheekbones and his whole face was tattooed artistically with blisters from poison nuts. He said bewilderedly, "Why you want me, *señorita?*"

"I want you to take a message to your friends—wherever they are."

The Mixco looked dumbly to the head waiter as if to say, "Who is this *señorita* who knows so much?"

"You can trust her, Pongo," the head waiter said. "She is Tio Wilson's daughter, savvy? She gave me orders about you. 'Give him all the rum and quinine he wants,' she said. 'To these Germans my father was *amigo,* and I will be the same,' she says."

The Indian chewed on this and agreed, "I will take the message *mañana*—if there is a *mañana.*"

"Yes, I know. You believe that lie about the volcano," the girl said. "Then I'm going to tell you the latest news. There won't be any eruption. If there was the slightest chance of it the authorities would order everyone in this town to get out, wouldn't they?"

The huge head nodded stupidly.

"Then what are you afraid of?"

The Indian voiced the curious state of mind of the whole city when he said, "I do not believe the prophecy, yet I do believe."

"Fifty dollars might help you make up your mind," Luella said. "Take my message tonight."

The Indian licked his lips. "Fifty dollars gold, not Mex," he said.

"You're smarter than I thought." Luella glanced at the clock, then to the head waiter. "Give him the money and also a drink on the house."

But the Indian still stood there, clumsy and bewildered. "The message, *señorita*—you did not say what it is."

She had forgotten that point completely. The message of course was of no importance whatever. She concocted one on the spur of the moment. "Tell those Nazis that their plot worked. The town's in a panic and the constabulary was called back. They're safe for a few days whereever they're hiding."

When the muleteer shambled out mumbling the message over to himself Luella whispered to the bartender, "Keep giving him drinks until Newt gets here."

AT TEN minutes to eleven the head waiter came back and announced the arrival of Don Pasqual.

Cool and magnificent, the old patrician paused at the door and gave one of his Don Quixote bows. "The thing is done," he said dramatically. "And your part went off without a hitch, I hope?"

Luella stared at him puzzled, then glanced at the time. "What do you mean? What went off?"

"The plot. Newtito and the muleteer—they have left together?"

"It's not time yet," she said. "Three minutes more. Newt won't be here before eleven. He said he'd be here on the dot. That was his promise."

"But it is peculiar!" Don Pasqual said. "It is quite a long time now since the taxicab picked him up."

She ran to the window. "The streets are crowded," she said, steadying her voice. "The taxi may have been blocked by some of those ox carts."

"No doubt," Don Pasqual said, walking to the window where he stood behind her. He looked down to the patio, saw the tethered mule, then looked at his watch. "Saint of my name! It is after the ordained time!" He turned suddenly and called to the head waiter who was on the way back to the bar downstairs. "Find out if a taxicab stopped in front. The orders were that it stop in back, but doubtless there was some mistake."

The head waiter came back. "Yes, *señor*, a taxicab stopped," he said. "The white and green one driven by Chipo. I was watching for it—but it was only a sugar planter who stepped out."

"That is not the one!" Don Pasqual said. "There was no other?"

The head waiter scratched his bristled chin. "There was another, *señor*, a cab with the red pompoms around the top. But it kept on towards the power-house road."

Luella Wilson turned to gasp something, then seemed to answer herself. "No, Newt Bradford wouldn't do that!"

Don Pasqual shook his head. "No, of course not. Newtito would not do that. He understands this was a dying wish of your father's that these Nazis be trapped."

"And he understands you would be sent to prison," the girl said, trying to reassure herself as well as the *don*. "You are his best friend! So what are we thinking about anyway!"

"He understands it would be an incident involving Venezuela and your great country. No! He is my beloved friend! He would not do it! We must not think what we are thinking!"

Luella looked at the clock hopefully. "He's only six minutes late. That's nothing. He'll be here. You've known him a long time, haven't you, Don Pasqual? I've only known him a few hours but I'll bet on him!"

She stopped when she saw the *don's* eyes. They were white-rimmed. They were terrifying. His lips moved slowly. "It is not possible! No man would do this—to his best friend!"

It was then that the girl remembered Carl Nachtrieb and what he had done to Newt.

CHAPTER IV

RACKET ANGLE

NEWT believed that a temblor had shaken the earth, bringing an avalanche of bricks on the taxi, cracking his skull, burying him alive. He was still in the taxi that had picked him up at José Pepé's

curio shop, but it took him a long time to understand why it should be bumping and rattling along at such a rate.

As he remembered, vaguely, it was supposed to take him around the plaza. The vagueness was due to an indecision that entered his mind just before José Pepé gave him that "passport" to Brazil. But he was sure—gradually—that he had torn that passport up and handed the pieces back to José Pepé with thanks. He was not going to Brazil, he had told José, even though that seemed a very sensible thing to do. He had explained to José and to himself that he had given his word to his best friend, not to mention a girl whom he wanted for his wife.

Despite the driving pain in his head he was able to think back bit by bit. The taxicab, he remembered had red pompoms around the rim of the top, and its name painted on it like other cabs in San Justo. The name of this one was "The Hand of God." He remembered drawing the tassled shades himself and then riding in darkness around the plaza.

He had kept his sense of direction imperfectly by the sound of the open-air night club. The jabbering of the crowds in the plaza faded out as the cab turned into a side *carerra*. This must be behind Tio Wilson's cantina, he had estimated, although he was confused when the driver made another turn and kept going.

"What's wrong? Where you taking me?" he had called.

"Just around the meat packer's, *señor*. A civil guard motioned me not to stop. As you *Norteamericanos* say—a traffic jam."

There had been nothing suspicious about this until Newt noticed that the hum of the crowds and the marimba bands melted to silence. The air had grown spicier and there was a whiff of the savannas in it.

"Stop! Where the Sam Hill are you going! Who told you to bring me out here!" He had yelled this, pulling up the shade and staring dumfounded at the first giant orchids on the jungle road.

"I help you escape, Señor Bradford. Hence what is this excitement that possesses you?"

"You were to take me to Tio Wilson's—what the hell!" It had occurred to Newt right then that he himself had not given this address at all. "The *sargento* at the jail—didn't he make that clear?"

"I can not understand, *señor*. Why should you go to Tio Wilson's? It has been noised around town that you have escaped from the *caliboza*, and since it is a matter of extradition there will doubtless be a big reward for you. Everyone will try to catch you, *señor*. But I am saving you!"

"No you aren't! Turn around! I'm telling you—not arguing."

"I will turn, *señor*." The cab had slowed down, but because of the gorge on one side, the orchid-draped trees on the other, it had been impossible to turn for another mile. "I will turn at the hydro-electric plant, *señor*."

Newt remembered that it was just beyond the plant that the cab had backed into the orchids, preparatory to turning. The driver had gotten out then as if to examine the ditch in back of the car. Newt opened the door to look out, gasping at the heavy jungle flowers as he peered into the darkness.

It was then that the "temblor" or whatever it was, cracked him on the head.

Thinking it over between the recurrent stabs of pain in the back of his skull, Newt remembered one significant statement this crook of a cab driver had made: "*There will doubtless be a big reward for you!*" It threw a lot of light on this black chaos whirling in his brain. Now it was obvious that he was being kidnapped and that must be the motive. But there was no way of guessing where he was going.

He was slumped in a corner of the cab, half lying, half propped by his own knees pressing against the driver's seat. He could see the driver's hunched back silhouetted against a green glare which the headlights cast against orchids and silk-cotton trees.

Newt blinked, trying to focus the driver into a single man instead of two. That blow on the back of his head had affected his sight like too much *guaro*.

A TWIST in the road sent Newt lurching against something that was propping him up on one side. It was not the side of the car against which he was slumped,

but something just as hard—a bony shoulder and a thick body that gave a little, swinging in balance with the car.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Bucho Blake," the tough-bodied figure next to him grunted.

In the moment of silence that followed this introduction Newt wondered how Bucho could have appeared so magically sitting in a cab out here in the *ceiba* jungles. There could be no explanation except that he was a ghost, materializing into concrete form.

It was especially mysterious when Newt remembered that no one had gotten into the cab while they were riding around the plaza. In fact it was reasonably certain that no one was in the cab except the driver and himself until they stopped "to turn around" at the hydro-electric plant. He could not remember anything after that, for when they stopped and he had thrust his head out of the door, somebody had brained him.

"And I'll make a good guess who it was." Newt thought the rest of it out loud. "*You* slugged me, didn't you, Bucho?"

Bucho shot a flashlight into his prisoner's face. "Hey, Rufino! This bird's all right now. He's figured everything out."

"*Bueno,*" the driver called over his shoulder. "Two-three miles and we are there."

As the car rattled on, Bucho said, "Have a little shot of this." He held a bottle to Newt's lips. "You had a gun, that's why I had to knock you out."

Newt said, after his swig, "O.K. But where are you taking me?"

"Just to a little hide-out on the river. I'll take you back to jail when they start talking turkey. The reward ought to be a good one."

"You're crazy! The jail break was a phony, so where do you figure on a reward?"

"It'll be a big one," Bucho repeated complacently, "when Don Pasqual finds out how you walked out on him."

Newt was stumped for a moment. "You know a hell of a lot about what's going on, don't you, Bucho?"

"Maybe you forgot I have the taxicab concession in town. What my drivers know, I know."

"A swell boner," Newt admitted miserably, "calling a taxi to take me around the block!"

"It's not your fault," Bucho said genially. "You didn't make any boner. You just lined out for the jungle with a gun and a map and the money they gave you. I wouldn't call that a boner."

"And you just pocketed the money—and the gun."

"What do you think?"

"I think you're a first class rat, Bucho, like any other gangster back in the States. You'll be in jail before you're through with this racket."

"I'm catching a fugitive they're extraditing on a murder rap. Is that a racket?"

"You're bucking the U.S. consul and the Venezuelan authorities besides. It'll be plain kidnaping when I get through telling 'em!"

"But before you get through telling 'em," Bucho chuckled, "we're going to tell 'em something else!"

The cab stopped where the road petered out to an oxcart trail. Newt heard the roar of water and smelled the dank air of the river as Bucho ordered him out. Bucho stood in the starlight, holding his pistol level in his jacket pocket. Newt could see his eyes twinkling under the hammered-down brows as he called to the cab driver.

"Go back and tell Don Pasqual how it happened, Rufino. Tell him Newt made you bring him out here. You can say he held a gun on you so you had to bring him this far. But you gave me the high sign before you left town, so I followed. That's the story you got to tell."

The driver nodded, grinning, but then said, "What reason shall I give that we did not merely take the man back as a prisoner?"

"Say that he jumped out of the car and I had to chase him." He pointed down to the glittering river. "There's a dry *barranca* cutting into a cliff—just the kind of a place a man could get cornered. I'm cornering him there, savvy? Until you find out about the reward. Take your time because the reward's going to get bigger every minute—if I know Don Pasqual!"

"I will come back, Señor Bucho, and do not worry about the reward. I have seen Don Pasqual angry before, and it is a terrible sight."

BUCHO shot his flash through the python vines of the steep bank, pointing out the trail. But he stayed behind his prisoner as they climbed down.

The barranca was a cleft in the steep banks with walls of capillary lava like slag wool. The heat of the tropic day seemed to be imprisoned here despite the river mist.

When they reached the hide-out Bucho remarked affably, "Guess we don't need a fire to make us comfortable. We'll just finish this bottle. You sit on that log yonder. I'll sit here."

He drank a large swig, passed the bottle, then took his position at the mouth of the miniature gulch. There was enough light so that he could watch Newt's dark figure on the log.

"I wouldn't figure on making a break. Ever try swimming with a man taking pot shots at you?" Bucho asked.

"Not in this river."

"I was just going to say that this river sure ain't the place to try it. Once I saw an Indian smash his canoe upstream a ways. By the time he finally got ashore, the pirana fish had eaten him clean. They smelled his blood on account he'd gotten hurt when his pirogue cracked up. The current just threw a skeleton ashore. Piranas won't bother you unless they smell blood. Then they'll come from a mile away!"

"I'm not going to try swimming, Bucho. And I'm not going to climb these rocks. I'm just going to wait for Don Pasqual and the *alcalde* and the consul—and maybe the girl. She'll want to be in on the kill, I'll bet."

"Too bad about the girl," Bucho said genially. "I made a mistake tonight, Newt. I thought you were after *my* girl, not Tio Wilson's daughter."

"Let me sleep, Bucho. I've still got that headache you gave me."

Bucho clicked his flashlight. "I sure did give you a wallop. Cracked your scalp, didn't I? Here, you better wash it." He went down to the water's edge and soaked a bandana, handed it to Newt. "I'm beginning to like you, Newt. You got sense. If I get the reward, maybe I'll fix up a real jail break for you. That's the way I do business. You and me could be friends. I could use you. You're a guy that's got sense."

This one-time New York gangster, Bradford reflected, was still trying to play all the angles. Rather than talk to him, Newt pretended to sleep.

And then, perhaps because of that head wound, he actually did sleep. He was not sure how much time had passed when he heard the nimble clunk of mule's hoofs on the hanging bridge some distance up-river.

It took time to separate that significant beat from the pumping of blood in his head. The night hummed with sound—the steady babble of the current, the roar of the cascades a furlong up-river, the call of the tiny "howling monkeys" in the *ceibas*. But it was those hoofbeats that made Newt jump.

It might have been any Guarauno muleteer crossing the river and heading westward, but why would he be riding at this time of night—and in the direction of Mount Quilado?

Newt glanced at his captor. Bucho was a pulpy shadow, his head tucked between enormous shoulders like a barrel cactus with a smaller barrel or lobe growing out of the main plant. That one glance convinced Bradford that Bucho was dozing at his post.

The echo of hoofbeats hammered at Newt's ears—a drum call summoning him to take a desperate chance. If he could only climb over Bucho, who sat directly in the path! If he could only follow that muleteer into the jungle, he might still accomplish his mission.

There was one way. Bucho was guarding the path up the cliff, but not the strip of beach at the mouth of the little gully. Newt leaned forward, his hands on his knees, so that he kept a sitting position as he walked. When he stepped from the scum-moist flotsam to the mud of the beach he saw Bucho's head jerk up.

"Hey! What you doing in that mud? If you want a drink, here's the bottle."

Newt dove.

When he felt a million hot needles stabbing him all over his body he remembered too late that clotting of blood on the back of his head. He wondered, aghast, how a school of pirana fish could smell blood and then act with such speed!

CHAPTER V

THE VOICE OF QUILADO

IN his wild thrashing, Newt had only one thought—to get back to shore; and only one sensation—that of being burned alive. He was flabbergasted to find himself still conscious when he got back to the mud beach.

He lay there with his face in warm ooze, too weak even to roll over and gasp for a breath of air. What was happening to him now did not matter in the slightest. He accepted it with a bland, slap-happy resignation. It seemed very logical that Bucho was tying his wrists, even though the knots cut like razors into raw flesh.

Bucho did a good job, swearing at every tug. "Jumping into a school of piranas! I didn't think you wanted to get away that bad!"

Newt wondered just how much flesh there was left on his bones. And Bucho seemed to be wondering too, the same amazement ringing in his voice. "What I'd like to know is, how you got out of it—and not a scratch!"

Newt got back the breath he had spent in that frenzy of splashing. He could talk, but he talked like a madman. "That monk who started the panic in San Justo," he rambled on wildly. "Bucho! Before a volcano blows up, the underground lakes get hot—"

"What are you raving about?" With his light Bucho was still trying to find some wound ripped by pirana teeth. "They didn't touch you! But I saw 'em—little flashes of silver jumping all around you when you dove!"

Newt still mumbled to himself, "The river comes down from the underground lakes around Mount Quilado—"

"Listen, Newt. Pull yourself together. You aren't hurt. Not a scratch. But you look boiled all over."

"Boiled? Funny thing, Bucho. That's just how it felt. It felt like hot needles. Maybe that's what it was—hot water scalding me." He gasped for more breath. "Maybe it wasn't piranas."

Bucho scowled hard, his flash shooting a clearly marked shaft through mist. "Your clothes are steaming! It *was* hot water!" And then half to himself, Bucho said, "I thought it was fish when you dove—because the splash made silver light everywheres. That's what piranas look like when they're attacking. It was only water and stars shining."

Bucho stared at the river, shooting his light over the misty-white surface. It always steamed a lot when the sun sucked up the mists but there was no sun now, although above the silk-cotton trees a gray light was breaking.

Bucho stepped to the edge of the mud beach and put his hand in the current. "B'God, it *is* hot!"

"And that's why the piranas didn't get me," Newt said. "There aren't any piranas. They're all dead!"

Bucho thought this over for a moment, then looked up anxiously towards the road. Sandalwood trees and *ceibas* made an interlacing network against the dawn. Bucho shrugged and then dragged his prisoner to dry ground. "O.K. The piranas are dead. River's hot. No fish alive in it except maybe jojarras from the hot lakes."

"You know what happened before?" Newt said. "In 'Seventy-eight the underground lakes sent up steam through the fissures around Quilado. Maybe that monk was right after all!"

"What are you talking about! What's the hot river got to do with the monk?"

"He made a prophecy. He knew the signs. He was a doctor once, he said. A wise man, with degrees from the Sorbonne. We better get out of here, Bucho!"

"The monk was with those Nazis—"

"What of it? He's a missionary and a fanatic; helps those Guaraunos and maybe anyone else lost in the forest. Sure, he helped the Nazis. He confessed that much. And that's why we all thought he was lying about the volcano."

"If he wasn't trying to start a panic and sabotage business, then he's crazy. So are you. There ain't any signs a volcano gives before it blows up!"

"That's what you think! The springs stop flowing—that's one sign. I heard about that in Guatemala." Newt struggled to his feet. It was all he could do to keep his balance. "And there's another sign. Gasses come out of vents all around the main cone—the parent mountain, they

call it. The monk said he could tell by the birds. That's why we didn't believe him. But maybe the birds got scared away by the gasses from the fumeroles—those are the little side vents I'm talking about. And there's vapor from the fumeroles before an eruption. Untie my arms, Bucho! Let's get going!"

"You mean," Bucho said, impressed, "all this happens before a blow-up? I don't believe it. If we know this much why don't we just hire a man to camp near a volcano and keep an eye on it?"

"That's exactly what they've done at Martinique. There's a French scientist there, watching Mount Pelée the year round! Let's run, Bucho! Untie those knots! I tell you, Quilado's going to blow up!"

Bucho said, brooding and frightened, "The monk! He knew something! Maybe he was in cahoots with the Nazis, maybe not, anyway he knew something! He knew it was coming!" He looked up in panic to the cordillera in the west.

MOUNT QUILADO caught the blaze of sunrise at the top of the conoidal pile so that it gave the stark illusion right then of a crater red hot on the top and pouring lava down the radial cracks.

Bucho gaped, his head shaking slowly. "No, 'tain't lava. I've seen it like that before. It's only sunlight." He gave a jerk of the head, his eyes frantically searching the opposite rim of the jungles to the east. The light, filtering dimly through vines and orchids, hit his face and his popping red eyes.

At the same time another but colorless light swept through the banked jungle growth. Motors chugged, stopped up there on the San Justo highway. A car's horn hooted at some animal in the road. A wild dog barked. A toucan yodeled back.

Newt watched that grim procession of avengers coming down to him. Bucho's henchman, the taxi driver, had gotten out of the first car. From the second—a seven-passenger—stepped Don Pasqual and a girl.

It was surprising, Newt thought, that none of the San Justo police had been brought along to make the arrest. But he got the answer to this immediately. The cab driver, leading the others down the switchback foot trail, was the first to reach the river beach.

The girl grabbed his arm. "Don Pasqual! Stop! He was your best friend!"

"Ten thousand gold—it is ours, Bucho!" he announced exuberantly. "But we must hurry. Look, only three of us dared come. For everyone is fleeing the city. The *alcalde* ordered San Justo evacuated! There is some new proof of this thing of the volcano!"

There was also a grim proof right here of Don Pasqual's fury, Newt thought. He was a creature of volcanic emotions himself, of benevolence and love, but also of terrible rage.

What did a volcano matter so long as he could punish this *Americano* who had betrayed him!

Newt heard the girl say as they walked single file into the gully, "Is he wounded?"

"Why does that worry you?" Bucho grunted. "A rat—and you ask if he's wounded."

Don Pasqual's voice was shaky. "Stand

back, Bucho, and you, *señorita.*" They all saw him draw the pistol.

The girl grabbed his arm. "Don Pasqual! Stop and think! He was your best friend you said over and over again."

"I said he broke his word to his best friend." In the sunrise Newt could see the *don's* lips, thin and white. "Untie his arms so he can stand up straighter and face me."

Bucho jumped in front of Newt with a pretense of obeying, but he said, "You're forgetting, Don Pasqual, he ain't your prisoner yet. He's mine—until we settle a point of business. Where's the reward you promised?"

"A ridiculous matter to bring up!" the *don* said irascibly. "You will be paid of course in San Justo. Whether he is dead or alive means nothing."

"Yes, but there's another angle. Maybe there won't be any San Justo when we get back!"

Newt shouldered Bucho out of the way. "Before you squeeze off that shot, Don Pasqual, at least let me say—"

"What can be said? You were a friend but you embraced me like a *matapalo* tree which embraces other trees only to destroy them!"

"I was kidnaped!" Newt said quickly. "Bucho here knew the whole plot and sent his cab—"

"A LIKELY story!" the *don* snorted. "You bribed the driver with the money this *señorita* —your friend—gave you!"

"Sure! It was in a cayman bag," Bucho said triumphantly. "A roll of bills. You showed it to 'em, Rufino?"

Rufino, nodding, said piously, "And I gave it back to them as proof that this is an honest thing I did, trapping this *hombre.*"

Newt's heart sank. Bucho and his henchman in playing for high stakes had put up a good sum as proof that the game was square!

But the girl said, "That's just why I suspected something queer, Bucho. Why would a fugitive give all the cash he has to the first man who helps him? He'd have to give a lot more bribes—but he gave his last cent to this cab driver."

To Newt's astonishment the *don* turned on the girl in a suppressed rage. "Did you come with me, *señorita,* to speak in this man's defense or to help exact our revenge?"

"I came because everyone said you'd stop at nothing when you've been wronged, Don Pasqual. I came to see that you give Newt just one chance."

Don Pasqual's eyes narrowed, focusing on the prisoner. "If there were the remotest chance of a doubt," he said, "I would grasp it eagerly." He shoved his pistol into his broad leather belt. "Until I am sure, I will not do this thing."

They went up single file as they had come down, Bucho and his cab driver leading, Don Pasqual and the girl directly behind the prisoner. Thus they were in a strung-out line scrambling up the steep bank when they heard a rumbling in the air.

Newt thought at first that it was the noise of an oxcart which he could see trundling along the road above the cliff. But then he knew that the noise came from the ground under his very feet. Stones began rolling down the bank although no footsteps nor cartwheel nor hoof had loosened them!

Everyone stood stupefied until the roaring retumbo and the tremor of the earth subsided. Then the two in the lead—Bucho and Rufino—bolted. They reached the top of the cliff, cranked the cab and jumped in. But an oxcart and two Guarauno Indians who had just come down the jungle road were blocking their way.

Newt heard Bucho shouting at them, the Indians shouting back. The oxcart had moved on when Newt and his captors reached the top of the bank, but the cab driver in his panic had flooded the engine and was out on the ground again cranking.

"That Indian said something," Bucho shouted. "They're all lining out of the jungle. Two of his tribe fell dead from gas that's coming out of the cracks all around Quilado!"

Newt looked back along the jungle road and saw two more oxcarts clattering along, the drivers beating their oxen with bamboo.

Bucho kept shouting as his driver jumped into the cab beside him. "He says

they found dead birds and wild dogs lying on the trail back yonder. Gas everywhere!"

Don Pasqual's eyes—no longer fixed on the prisoner—roved towards the Andes. Now they were fixed on the nearest of the foothills—the enormous crater of Quilado.

And everyone else watched it, hypnotized, waiting.

As that Guarauno Indian had said, birds, beasts and men were fleeing the savannas below Mount Quilado. Actually the exodus had started when the peccaries and tapirs and wild hogs found the water springs dry or the streams hot. The birds likewise had fled the noxious gases from fissures in the earth and the smoke from the parasitic vents.

On this sunrise the tiny night monkeys swung through the vines down to the river. An armadillo plodded down to the steaming water to cross, changed its mind and philosophically took to the bridge with the oxcarts.

IN this jungle evacuation, besides the Guarauno and Mixco Indians there were certain white men. These, however, were as surreptitious in their flight as the occasional jaguar. They rode in the oxcarts, hidden by the palm thatch which roofed the carts for this occasion. The drivers were Brazilians in tattered cotton blouses and fiber sandals. They were not conspicuous for they could pass easily as chicle hunters from the forest. One of the band was brown-faced and tattooed by nut juices. There was nothing suspicious about him either, for he might have been any Mixco escaping on his mule.

The dozen white men—tattered, fever-ridden, sore-eyed—huddled together, hiding under the thatch of the carts, until they crossed the bridge. The muleteer, of course, might have given the whole party away if Don Pasqual or Luella Wilson or Bradford had stopped to look. But when the oxcarts trundled up behind the two cars on the road, Don Pasqual and his companions were obsessed with the one purpose of getting their cars turned around in the direction of San Justo without more palaver.

It was during this delay that two men in torn, grass-stained clothes, slipped out from under their thatch covering and slouched up towards the first car.

Luella knew something was wrong. "These Indians want to hitch-hike," she whispered to the *don* who was at the wheel.

"But they're white men!" Don Pasqual exclaimed. "They are *bandidos!*"

Newt turned his head with difficulty to peer through the back window. Yes, they were white men—those first two, and so were the others getting out of the oxcarts. Their wild eyes, pale and flaming, gave him a turn of the stomach at the very moment that two shots roared.

Don Pasqual was changing to high gear when his foot pressed with the weight of his slumping body. The engine raced uselessly in neutral and the car rolled to a stop.

In the second car the cab driver clutched at his wheel as he jerked forward, rolled and hung over the sill of the door window.

A man with flabby jowls and shining gray eyes shouted, "Out, everybody! Or the same to you will happen!" His jowls, as Newt could see clearly, were cross-hatched white—the tiny duel scars dear to the heart of any German. It was easy to guess that this was the leader of the Nazi and Integralista refugees.

Bucho was quick to jump from his taxi-cab and lift his thick, shaking arms. "O.K., gents, I'm with you! I ain't with that bunch in the car ahead. I'll—"

A slug bored his barrel chest as he spoke.

Luella gasped at the cold-blooded act. "Are you going to kill us all?"

"Not you," the scarred German said. "We take you with us!" It was then that he saw Newt in the back seat. "What's this! Another one! And hiding! I ordered you to come out—and with hands to be up!"

"Can't you see his hands are tied?" Luella snapped.

There was a guttural jabbering from the Germans who were piling into the two cars. One voice spoke calmly. The muleteer, sliding from his wooden saddle said, "Yes, this *hombre* is prisoner wanted for murder. I hear all about it in San Justo. And there is the reward for him—a big one."

The Germans in both cars honked impatiently. The scarred one snarled to the girl and the prisoner, "Stay where you are, inside, both! This reward business—it may be to us an advantage!"

Don Pasqual was dumped out. As he rolled, a pitiful groan came from his throat. No one heard it, but several saw him stiffen his long arms, propping himself up on all fours.

The scarred German glanced at him, looking down from the driver's seat. Before pressing the starter the German drew out his gun and aimed through the window at the old *don's* back. But he did not fire.

Newt thought with some astonishment that this German was softened by the picture of the majestic white-haired old man trying to get up. It was easy to see that the wounded man could not get far unless he succeeded in dragging himself to one of those oxcarts. The German must have thought of this possibility for he indulged in a final act of sadism before starting the car. He fired his gun not at Don Pasqual but at the two oxen and then at the mule which were the *don's* only means of escape.

The taxicab, behind the first car, honked frantically. Time had been wasted even though it had taken scarcely two minutes to commandeer the two cars. But minutes were priceless now. In fact one of those minutes was not only priceless but famous.

6:51 was the exact time, published all over the world, when Mount Quilado gave its first cataclysmic puff.

CHAPTER VI

THE JUDGMENT OF QUILADO

THE two cars went rattling and banging along the San Justo road. That blast which had stunned the passengers had not affected the engines. That is to say, not yet. But as the fine hot dust began to fall the carburetors reacted with the sensitivity of human life. The same deadly effect of the dust on mucous membranes worked on oil and air and sparks and gasoline.

The drivers raced madly, then blindly, for the morning light in the *ceiba* forests turned first into twilight then to pitch dark. That first eruption, shooting a band of hideous flame higher than the Andes, seemed to blow a hole through the sky and from this wound, whorls of jet black blossomed outward.

Slowly out of the complete darkness that covered the sky the volcanic rain and mud began to fall.

The three Nazis in the front seat started to cough and spit as the cinders blew in. The driver, his fat hands clinging to the wheel with a death grip, yelled to the man at his side. The latter fumbled for a bandana and tied it around the driver's face, then ripped his shirt with a knife and made a mask for himself.

When everyone else did the same thing, the girl leaned forward and said to the man directly in front of her, "That prisoner needs something for his face."

"*Bueno.* You fix him, *señorita,*" the man answered without turning. It was the muleteer who occupied one of the tip-back seats. Newt occupied the other, while four Nazis were jammed in the back seat with the girl on one man's lap. Thus Luella could speak directly into the Indian's ear.

As the tires screeched on an unbanked curve she put her cheek almost against the muleteer's. "Give me a knife. You ought to know who I am. Have you forgotten that my father supplied you with rum and quinine?"

Newt could hear part of this although he, as well as the Nazis in the back seat, were staring back toward Quilado's fire-pit. It was like the rim of the sun going down and from this point of red the radial cracks down the mountainside began to gleam. The muleteer was saying softly, "I remember, *señorita.* You are Tio Wilson's daughter." He added, speaking from the side of his mouth, "For that reason I will help. But, *por dios!* A knife—"

"I'll give it right back. How could I harm anyone with it?"

"If it is just to cut a piece of cloth, but," he said anxiously, "do not let this prisoner see me give it to you. By some miracle he may get it." He slipped the bowie knife to her.

The conoidal pile of Quilado gleamed in a web of red as the lava spilled over the

"Don't kill that one in the sombrero! He is the one who helped us!"

rim. Newt gaped, thrilled at the splendor of it, but his gape was smothered by the makeshift bandana the girl tied over his face.

The car slithered in mud that had rained from the sky, then lurched to the soft shoulder, staggered back and by its own momentum kept upright like a top. The taxicab ploughed in with a brutal crash.

It seemed a puny and inconsequential sound compared to that second puff from the caldera.

The volcano's old vent, plugged for two generations, had been reopened so that the mountain vomited its brimstone steadily except for intermittent belches. This second eruption, which was recorded at 7:12—spouted "bombs" a mile high.

Newt was dazed. He saw double as if he had had another blow on the head—for that was exactly what the roar of that crater was like. He saw what looked like two drivers, leaving the wheel, groping their way out like sleep-walkers. They must be as dazed as he was, he realized.

The rest of the Germans got out the same way, reeling. The muleteer crawled out of his side, clutching at the door as if the car had turned over. Apparently that roar had destroyed everyone's balance. The Nazi who had been sitting behind Newt groped frantically for the door handle. He lurched forward heavily, clutching at Newt's shoulder.

From the taxi which had landed in the ditch there was the same dazed exodus of bewildered scarecrows, all of them masked with bandanas. They seemed blind even though the headlights of the stalled car were still on, shooting into a landscape of once violent colors now coated with ash.

In those few moments Newt felt the bonds around his wrists snap as the girl sliced the last strand. Then he felt the heft of the bowie in his palm.

The man behind him was frantically tugging at the door handle which was at Newt's elbow. "Gott damn! Why do you sit there in my way! Son of two swine!" he screamed through his gag. His fist landed on the back of the prisoner's neck, then crashed again through the window glass. He got halfway out, head and shoulders through the window, but then gave a muffled death gasp. Anyone hearing it might have thought that a splinter of the window had poked through his ribs!

No one, it so happened, even noticed that quiet death. Except of course, Newt, who let the knife stay there where he had thrust it home. He had no further use for it now that he had the German's gun.

"Stay in here and keep your head low," he whispered to the girl, climbing out her side of the car.

ONE of the Germans was mumbling orders to the dazed crew. He was the Nazi leader, Newt knew, although his duel-scarred jowls were hidden under a mask. The guttural language was unintelligible, but his gestures were clear, pointing to his men to get the taxi out of the ditch.

Only two or three helped at first. Most of them drifted around helplessly, stunned, like lost souls in this purgatory of ashes. Several just stood staring at the livid streams coursing down the mountainside. Every man was thinking of those lava rivers racing towards them at thirty miles an hour. The Nazi leader lost his temper and kicked one of his own dazed men in the stomach.

A gun cracked from behind the hood of the car. This was mutiny, everyone thought, for it was their leader who clutched his chest and fell. They thought, also, that it must be one of the Brazilian Integralistas, who had made the mortal mistake of admiring Hitler. But only one German drew his gun to avenge the deed. He looked around stupidly, unable to tell which man was a Nazi, which a Brazilian Fascist.

The rest of the crew kept working madly to get the car on the road. They worked shoulder to shoulder, no man knowing who his helper was.

Newt, whose clothes were as shabby as any because of his dive in the river and his roll in the black ooze, walked among them calmly, picked up the slain Nazi's gun and brought it to the girl.

They had the taxicab out of the ditch now, but at a crazy angle. When a man climbed in to turn the wheel a gun roared from the dark, tearing out his life.

Completely hidden by a network of vines and orchids and hanging roots, Bradford started to work on the rest.

Those stabs of light from the orchids were tiny scratches compared to the rivers of lava. Against the ceiling of ash clouds, the fire-pit threw a dull glow. This uncanny light was suffused with fleecy banks of steam where the lava rivers coursed down the arroyos and met water.

Here by the two cars a puny battle raged for perhaps one minute. Against such a cataclysmic background it seemed so inconsequential as to be ridiculous. Three of the Nazis hurled useless shots into the orchids, but the rest—those who were not picked off like clay ducks—stood with their hands up.

As Newt, like a masked *bandido,* stepped through the vines and flowers, the girl called to him. "Don't kill that one with the straw sombrero! He's the muleteer who helped us!"

"You helped them!" one of the Germans spat out, his arms stiffening.

"Yes, Señor Nazi! It is just payment for all of you who shot my mule in cold

blood—my mule which was my staff, my life, my cassava bread!"

"Then I can trust you, *amigo,*" Newt said. He ordered the muleteer to help tie the prisoners back to back.

When the muleteer came with what rope there was left in the car, he pleaded, "Time is precious, why tie them when there is the automobile for our escape?"

"I'm using that for something else," Newt said. "I said I could trust you, *amigo.* If you let any one of them get a gun you will be the first one shot."

"That I know well enough, *señor.* What shall I do to be saved?"

"Stand guard on this bunch till I get back." Newt called to Luella, "You stay in that car but keep two guns covering them. I'm taking this cab." He jumped in, backed the cab almost to the ditch, turned it towards Mount Quilado.

"What in the world are you doing!" Luella gasped.

"You saw what happened to the old *don.*"

The muleteer exclaimed, "*Madre de dios!* The river will be not of water but of lava! Call him back, *señorita!* He is crazed. He is touched by the gods in the head! He is going to save the one who offered a reward for him dead or alive!"

The girl called out, "I'll be here when you get back, Newtito!"

A WIND, hotter than the *temporales,* hit Newt's face. There was the smell of burning *jaragua* grass and of melting earth. It was like the burning of the corn and *henequin* fields in the hot season, bringing darkness and fire simultaneously.

As he raced in the direction of the volcano the caldera shot its band of white upward, like a palm tree with black feathery clouds for branches. Thus as Newt drove on, bumping over the fallen stones and volcanic mud, it grew darker with raining ash, and also brighter from the glare of the fire-pit. The heat and the fine dust seared his eyeballs. He gasped and so did the motor. With the heat growing, the engine pinged loudly and choked. Newt nursed it, shifted to low.

As he neared the river a tapir galloped into the headlight circle, but stopped, blinked and kept coming, racing past. The whole jungle was alive and fleeing. Jaguar and hog deer ran together, for there was no longer hunger but only fear. Those vultures called urubus did not stop in their flight even though there was much carrion a little further on—oxen, a mule, men. Monkeys, swinging along through the vines, peered through the incandescent drizzle at this strange thing—a car and a man going the wrong way!

This was exactly what a voice yelled at him as an oxcart drew to the side of the road to let him pass. "Go with God, *señor!* But you ride towards hell!"

"Did you see Don Pasqual—an old man, wounded—"

"I saw dead men, *señor,* and dead oxen and a mule. But I did not stop. I flee fire and brimstone, *señor.* Go with God!"

Newt rode on towards a distant cascade of molten lava which marked the end of the world and the beginning of hell. It was the clouds of white steam that told him he had reached the river.

He could not remember getting out, for he was like a man in a raging fever, catching only random moments of consciousness.

"Saint of my name!" he heard Don Pasqual's weak cry. "Whoever you are, *amigo,* it is God who sent you!"

Newt blinked fast against the hot glare. He saw the *don's* silvery mane and his glazed eyes above the bandana. The old fellow was trying to get up from his knees, but his long body crumpled like a scarecrow loosed from its stake. He had barely enough strength to groan as Newt carried him to the car, "I am very weak, *amigo.* But God helped me, sending flaming rocks to bake these plantain leaves!" He had dressed his wounded shoulder himself. "Baked plantain leaves are best for gun wounds, *amigo.*"

When Newt lifted him to the back seat of the cab the *don* whispered, "But who are you whom God sent, *amigo?*"

"I am your *amigo*—that's right, Don Pasqual."

As the car turned and rattled on down the road Don Pasqual realized that there was something familiar about the slope of those shoulders in front of him in the driver's seat. A white man with a red, boiled neck that gave him the appearance of one of those Germans! But why would

"Saint of my name! Whoever you are, amigo, God sent you!"

a German come back to save a wounded old man? Why would any man do such a thing?

For that last mile Newt had driven half blind. "Feeling" for the road, he almost banged into that oxcart he had passed on the way up. This was his guide until he reached the prisoners.

"*Amigo,* stop!" he called to the oxcart driver. "You have room for some prisoners. Your name will be put on the tablet of heroes in the plaza."

But the cart driver yelled over his shoulder. "There will be no plaza, *señor!* Why be a hero in hell, anyway?" He drove on but he had to drive to one side of the road to avoid a car coming in the opposite direction.

Newt did not notice the car, nor did Luella who was wiping the sweat and ashes from his forehead and eyes.

When, for one moment, Newt's face was bared, a voice from the back seat exclaimed, "Newtito!"

Other voices from outside the car exclaimed a little later, "Bill Moran!"

Luella turned to see two men—the *alcalde* and the consul, Rod Sandeman—stepping to the door.

The consul, after his first look inside the cab, turned to stare at the strange group of men—the Nazis bound back-to-back, the muleteer standing over them, the bodies littering the roadside. While the muleteer told him what had happened the *alcalde* heard the story from the girl.

The *alcalde* said, "Can this be true—that this man is the murderer, Bill Moran?" He stared long and hard at Newt.

From the back seat the voice of Don Pasqual came in scarcely more than a whisper. "It is true. It is Bill Moran, the

one wanted for extradition. That is not his name. His name is Newtito!"

While the prisoners were being dumped into the two cars, Newt looked up and saw the girl sitting beside him. He saw a strange light on her face. She was in love, that was certain, but there was still his past. The strange glow in her eyes might be conflict, tragic doubt.

The consul, when they were ready to start, said, "Let me drive this cab, Newt."

From the back seat the old *don* laughed softly, "You see, even the consul knows his real name!"

The consul gave a grim smile, saying nothing. It was the *alcalde* who spoke. "Of course the Señor Consul knows his real name! And so do I. It is Newt Bradford. That other man, who is known as Bill Moran, fled to the jungles last night and the eruption of Quilado wiped him out. It is very simple. No one will ever hunt for Bill Moran again. Quilado has judged what he did! I shall see that it is thus officially reported," the *alcalde* concluded, turning to his own car.

Newt sat in the front seat between the consul and Luella. For some miles of driving no one spoke. But Newt was thinking hard. The consul, he noticed, had said nothing in response to the *alcalde's* naive solution—the judgment of the volcano, and the passing of the man, Bill Moran.

Suddenly Newt burst out, "You won't have to tell any lies in your report about me, Rod."

"I'm glad you said that, Newt."

"I want you to send me back to the States, Rod."

"You—*what?*"

"I'm not going to be a fugitive from justice the rest of my life. I've made up my mind—not for my own sake, but for the sake of someone I love. I want Bill Moran's name to be cleared."

"I'm going back with you," the consul said. "I'm going to report this whole thing the right way. Luella told me the whole story—what you told her about your German-American friend with the mother and kid sister held hostage in Munich. She said you'd even do it all over again! I believe every damn word and syllable of it. You've proved it! And I'm going to make the authorities believe it when we get to the States. I'm going to find that German friend of yours who double-crossed you—what was his name?"

"Carl Nachtrieb doublecrossed me only because he was crazy with fear of what the Nazis would do to his mother and sister. But with Germany on the run at last maybe he won't be so afraid now."

"I'll make him tell the truth!" Rod Sandeman swore. "I'll find a way to clear you, Newt, so help me God!"

ROUNDING a curve they all had a sudden view of San Justo, its whitewashed adobe huts stained red-brown, its tiles turned gray. Beyond, a long line of ox-carts, mule-drawn *diligencias*, cars with headlights on, ponies, burros, wound down the slope toward the coast.

From the back seat of the car, Don Pasqual breathed as if praying, "My home! My city! Saint of my name! San Justo is Pompeii!"

The fourth and last eruption of Quilado was merely an echo. But that same band of light shot skyward. Newt Bradford's eyes stabbed and burned as if they were candle flames held below his forehead.

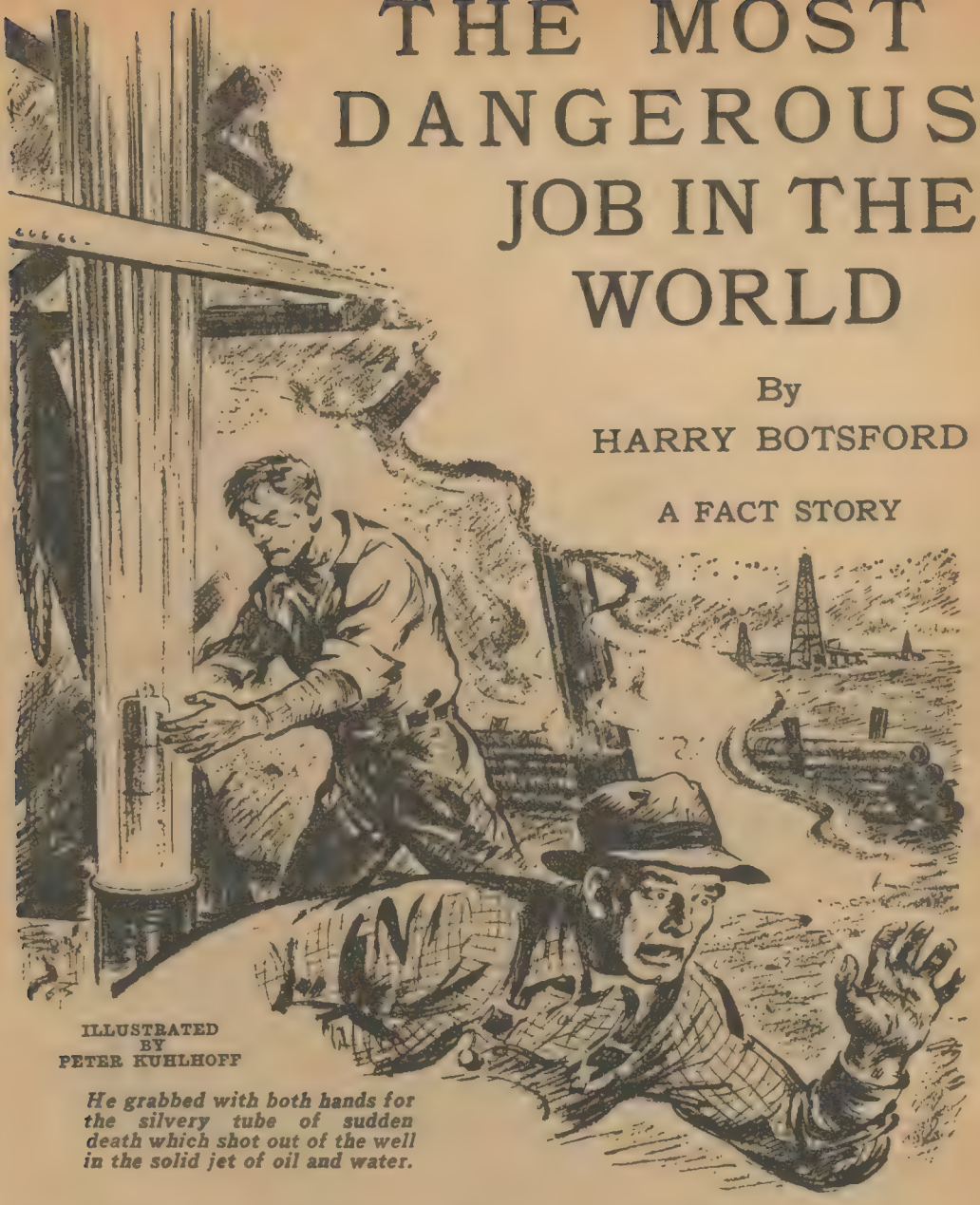
He saw the girl staring at him, and he saw that strange illumination again burning in her eyes.

This time there was no doubt.

THE MOST DANGEROUS JOB IN THE WORLD

By
HARRY BOTSFORD

A FACT STORY



ILLUSTRATED
BY
PETER KUHLHOFF

He grabbed with both hands for the silvery tube of sudden death which shot out of the well in the solid jet of oil and water.

MY FRIEND, August Bond, oil well "shooter," sat sprawled in the shade of his truck. There was a gallon can between his knees. He touched it with a grimy but respectful finger.

"This is a blockbuster," he said quietly. An economical grin flashed across his face and erased a wilderness of wrinkles, making him look suddenly youthful.

"We have had blockbusters since 1865," he continued slowly, chewing a blade of grass. "Drop one of these in a city of ten thousand and there won't be much left when it is all over. I've handled this stuff for fifteen years. Sometimes I think I know what nitro will do—and then something happens that upsets the dope and I start wonderin' again.

Wonderin' ain't especially healthy for a guy in this business."

He spoke the bitter truth. Three months later I heard a dull, ominous, far-away thunder one sunny morning. A few minutes later my telephone rang. I was informed that Augie Bond's truck of nitroglycerin had exploded just a mile away from Pleasantville, Pennsylvania. Fifteen minutes later I was at the site of the tragedy.

There wasn't much to be seen. There was a nine-foot hole torn in the smooth cement highway and the explosion had ripped a wide and wicked path through the thick growth of mature trees. Oaks and maple trees were twisted and shattered into millions of gigantic toothpicks. Of the heavy truck, only pieces the size of your fist could be found.

August Bond was dead. There was no doubt of that. Of course, there was no corpus delicti. If you live in the oil fields, you don't expect that when nitro explodes when it has no business to—which is all too often.

Augie Bond was about forty years of age. He was an old hand as a shooter. Never was there a more careful worker, a better driver. He respected nitro but he never feared it. He was a sober and a nerveless individual and not given to carelessness.

Yet, It happened to him—as It happens to most of the rugged individuals in the trade. Seldom does a man live long enough to retire.

August Bond had no illusions. He once told me that when he clicked out, he wouldn't suffer. "Family won't have to spend any money on a fancy casket to bury me, either," he said with a thin smile. He was right.

The mortality is so high, the hazards so great, that no insurance company will accept as a risk a man engaged in the manufacture, transportation or use of nitro. Which gives you a rough idea of what the job is like!

STRANGELY enough, when It happens to a shooter there is always a flood of applicants for the job. Just why, it is difficult to explain. Certainly the wages are not rich or juicy—not nearly as high as a shipbuilder or a war plant worker earns today. Like many oil field jobs, however, there is a certain amount of glamor attached to it—glamor that appeals to many young men.

As a youngster in the oil fields, I had a distinct ambition to become a shooter—something akin to the onetime desire of very young fellows to become firemen, engineers or plane pilots. My father, an old oil man, once worked for several months as a shooter—until his parents discovered what he was doing. I reminded him of this when I was summarily and shamefully yanked from the job of being an apprentice shooter. He only grinned and remarked that the time might come when I'd have to perform the same duty with *my* son . . . and I hope he was wrong.

Wherever you find oil wells, you will find nitro and the men who handle it. That has been true since 1865 when one Colonel E. A. L. Roberts, late of the Union Army, arrived in the sickly and ailing oil fields of Pennsylvania with a patent for "Roberts' Torpedo" and what he claimed was a sure-fire cure for the ailing oil wells.

The oil industry was no more than six years old and already in a dying condition. Oil men knew what the ailment was, but they hadn't been able to discover a cure. Fresh water or cold air eventually reached the oil-bearing sands and the paraffin contained in the structure immediately congealed. The oil well stopped producing a paying quantity of oil. The producers scratched their heads, wasted a lot of profanity. Some pretty fancy cures were devised, mostly of a chemical nature. None of them proved effective. Truth was, the industry was about ready to expire when Colonel Roberts appeared on the scene.

His first experiment was on the famous Ladies' Well, almost over the protests of the reluctant owner. The output of the well, once a famous and prosperous oil producer, had dwindled to the vanishing point.

One experiment was sufficient to prove the efficacy of the Colonel's method. On a cold and blustery January day, Ladies' Well was shot and immediately started to produce oil at a rate that made it a most profitable investment again.

The Roberts prescription was a simple one: Nitro was poured into tin tubes which were lowered down the drilled hole and rested against the oil-bearing sand. Water was then poured down the hole to make a tamping. The nitro was exploded by an instrument known even to this day as a "go-devil."

A go-devil is a simple device. It is a tin tube about eighteen inches long into which a stick of dynamite fits snugly. Just below the dynamite is a fulminate-of-mercury explosive cap, which explodes when struck. Below this cap is a firing pin, the end of which projects below the end of the go-devil. The instrument is dropped down the well and the firing pin strikes the "shells" of nitro. Smack! The pin is driven upward against the cap, exploding it and the dynamite—and the nitro.

The Roberts' blockbuster owed its terrific shattering force to nitro, one of the most powerful explosives of all time—and one of the most unpredictable.

The water-tamping momentarily confined and directed the impacts of the explosion sideward and downward. That force created crevices and channels in the oil sands, permitting accumulations of oil to flow freely into the drilled hole. In addition, the terrific heat of the explosion melted all of the clogging elements of paraffin. Following the explosion, the drilled hole acted as a gigantic gun barrel through which the volume of shattered rock and sand, oil and water roared upward and over the top of the oil derrick, leaving the well virtually renewed and as good as ever.

It all sounds most simple. Yet, the patent issued to Colonel Roberts proved to be airtight in spite of a thirty-year sustained effort on the part of the oil industry to break it. Lives were lost, endless litigation started in the battle of the industry *vs.* Roberts—but he stood fast and reaped a harvest that has been estimated at being in excess of a million dollars—money which he undoubtedly rightfully earned, for his invention saved the infant oil industry. The Roberts methods have remained unchanged through nearly eight decades. Today, there are probably well over a thousand oil shooters in the oil fields of the world.

A patient French chemist named Ascanio Sobrero discovered nitro when he hit upon a new compound composed of nitric and sulphuric acids and glycerin. For twenty years the world knew but little of its destructive ability; it was largely used as a medicine. The first publicity nitro received in this country was when some was given to James G. Blaine on his death bed. Then a man carrying a small vial of diluted nitro dropped it in a New York street and it killed him and seventeen bystanders. Both incidents made headlines.

NITRO isn't sinister in appearance. It has a mild, syrupy golden look. In the oil field it is manufactured in small plants hidden safely in the hills. It is impossible to make nitro in large quantities. At one stage of its making, should the machinery fail, the stuff will explode instanter. Men discovered that the hard way. As a result, every nitro plant is equipped with devices that can be operated manually should the power plant break down or fail.

The making is likewise a part of the shooter's job. After nitro is made, it is hauled to a magazine for storage. These magazines are usually located in deep hill caves. Nitro freezes easily and must be thawed before it can be exploded. As a result, most magazines are heated. Every once in a while, a magazine explodes; why, no one knows—nor probably ever will. After an explosion, there just isn't any evidence left.

It is well known that nitro, if improperly washed, will explode by spontaneous combustion. But thorough washing of the liquid today is a routine matter and yet it hasn't cut down materially the mysterious magazine explosions that appear to be inevitable.

Nitro has queer qualities. It can, for example, be burned in a lamp, as an illuminant. I once witnessed such an experiment. When I was informed that the lamp was filled with nitro, however, I suddenly remembered a pressing and urgent engagement elsewhere. Chemists inform me that this is a safe experiment. It is not recommended, however!

The slightest concussion, as a rule, ex-

plodes nitro. I once knew a lad of twelve who was killed by an ancient nitro can he exploded by shooting at it with an air rifle. The old can had been reposing in a cellar for at least ten years—yet the few drops of nitro that remained still had deadly power.

Then again, nitro will sometimes absorb all sorts of jars without exploding. August Bond showed me a photograph and told me a story that proves this. He had a brother who was a shooter in the Oklahoma oil fields. Tooling a nitro truck along the side of a steep hill one winter day, he lost control of the truck when it swerved into a rut and it rolled down the hill, spraying gallon cans of nitro all over the landscape. The cans were badly damaged—yet they failed to explode. Oil men still look upon this as a major miracle.

Bond's brother had the truck righted, gathered up the cans of nitro, placed them in their felt-lined cells, and proceeded on his way—which, in my humble opinion, called for courage of the highest order.

One day at Bradford, Pennsylvania, a relative of mine, a successful oil producer, was literally forced into the position of being a hero. He always claimed that there was nothing else he could have done under the circumstances.

A newly drilled oil well was being "shot" with a heavy charge of nitro, a matter of 100 quarts. The shell which contained the explosive had been lowered to the oil sand, a matter of approximately 1700 feet.

My relative stood on the derrick floor and suddenly became acutely conscious of a sinister, hair-raising sound. He knew what it meant: The well had most unexpectedly started to flow. Down in the oil sand, a heavy volume of natural gas that had been imprisoned for centuries had forced its way through a channel and was forcing upward the water and oil contained in the drilled hole—and with it, a hundred quarts of the most destructive industrial explosive known to man.

HE HAD to think quickly—and straight. It was a matter of seconds. The other workers had departed without ceremony. To run would be to invite immediate death, as the heavy blockbuster would rocket into the air, strike something solid and explode forthwith. He stepped toward the casing head, where the roar of the ascending mass had reached a screeching crescendo, and opened his arms, muttering a fast and fervent prayer.

The water and oil, a solid jet twelve inches in diameter, shot into the air, and in the core of it was the silvery five-inch tube of nitro. His arms closed around the tube and he stepped backward with an armful of sudden death. With great gentleness he walked to a corner of the derrick, leaned the sinister tin tube firmly against the derrick leg and wiped his face.

"If you fellers don't mind, I'm going right home," he explained to the driller and tool-dresser when the well had stopped flowing and they had returned to the derrick. "Minute by minute, I'm gettin' more scared. Me, I need a drink. The biggest one in the world!"

Years later, he could and did laugh about it. But from that time on, he was usually absent when one of his wells was being shot, a precaution that seems to me to be most sensible.

The shooters who handle these industrial blockbusters live within a millionth of an inch of death every day of their lives. Oil field roads are usually no more than trails and sometimes wind across the side of a mountain with a sheer drop on one side. The roads are rocky and filled with ruts. The nitro trucks must follow these trails—and they do. It isn't fun riding atop hundreds of quarts of nitro in a truck that suddenly sinks hub-deep into a rut or rolls over a log or a big stone. It's all routine to the shooter. He is a superlative driver. He has to be. When he fails, It happens. And It happens only once to any man. Nitro is final.

Nitro trucks are carefully and cunningly made, the springs are special jobs and every part suspected of being weak is specially reinforced. The back of the truck, where the nitro is carried, is padded. Each can fits neatly and snugly into felt-lined cells.

In spite of every precaution, a load will explode on a perfectly smooth highway. Two years ago a friend was driving along such a road a few miles from Custer City, Pennsylvania, trailing a nitro truck almost a mile ahead. The truck was wheel-

ing along at a sedate and safe thirty miles an hour. The car in which my friend was riding was traveling at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Suddenly the truck exploded. The car in which my friend was riding was a heavy car. The one survivor said that it felt as if a gigantic hand had reached out and stopped the car in its tracks. My friend was instantly killed; his companion just managed to survive and to give testimony about the tragedy.

The fumes of exploded nitro are something to be avoided. One sniff and you'll have a savage, painful, throbbing headache which has been known to drive a man crazy for days. Prudent oil men wait long after a well has been shot before they approach. Some of them have suffered from a nitro headache and they fear it.

A shooter needs steady nerves. He needs a sure pair of feet, a body that works automatically. A sudden slip while he is carrying a can of nitro in each hand on the way to the derrick floor means death—a sudden, angry, red roar that smashes the countryside for miles.

Even pulling the cork from a can of nitro is fraught with danger. The friction generated may be enough to cause an explosion. It has happened many times.

FEW shooters ever reach old age. A small number work a few years and quit voluntarily. Some are discharged by management, if it is wise. I have known men to work for years and never make a single mistake, men who have kept cool and calm and unexcited. But daily rides with death, sober thinking about the hazards involved, possibly the death of a buddy—make these men start to change.

They become crabby, nervous, worried. Their faces are lined with worry, their eyes have a look that isn't in the least pleasant, a sort of a defiant, challenging expression. Managements of nitro concerns watch for such crack-ups, try to guard against them. There isn't a bartender or a liquor store clerk in an oil field town that won't report to management when a man starts taking too many drinks. In most oil field towns, nitro trucks pass over the main streets at all hours of the day and night. No one wants to see the town wiped out.

When a man shows signs of cracking, he is fired without ceremony. It is definitely for cause—and the shooter knows it, though he will take his discharge sullenly and claim that he is being done a great injustice. Management knows what it is doing. In the past some of them have listened to a shooter's plea, let him continue to work. Within a few weeks It happened. The man had become so careful that he was careless—and that's possible. Or, he took too many drinks. The result is the same.

A discharged shooter immediately leaves the oil town. He has lost caste. Men instinctively brand him as being yellow, a most unfair, unkind way of thinking. Very often he will work at some other task in another oil field. Some rest a few months and return to their regular work. A very few resort to a memorable binge of considerable duration. Often they sober up, go elsewhere and again become shooters of the best kind.

They live with drama and suspense. It is work that must be done. Otherwise our oil fields would not exist, our bombers, with their racks of compact blockbusters, could not go about their appointed tasks.

Shooters are funny guys. I've known, liked and respected them most of my life. They have a queer sense of values. I talked with a shooter friend from Oil City not long ago about a mutual friend who is now a bomber pilot in England.

"Man, you couldn't hire me to go up in one of them planes!" he said seriously and emphatically. "That's plumb dangerous! I'll do my ridin' on the ground."

The next morning, I happened to know, he was scheduled to shoot two wells, one at Red Hot, another at Poverty Hill. That meant he would carry at least 150 quarts of nitro and would travel miles over some of the worst roads I have ever known.

I'm older now. I have no yen to become a shooter. But I still honor the unsung guys who are doing a great and dangerous job, one seldom appreciated by the average citizen.

The next time you buy a gallon of rationed gasoline, just stop and think that you are getting it because of the small group of men who handle the peacetime blockbusters in the oil fields of America.

THE JUDAS TOUCH

By

JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

(For the Combined American Press)
ORAN, Feb. 16, 1944. (Delayed.)

THE French soldier said to me: You do not know what to write to your paper? It would be the same if you had been here in North Africa with your troops for two years instead of two months. But it is not the Arabs, nor the Jews, even; it is we French who puzzle, and we puzzle ourselves most of all. We are bewitched, my friend—but this also is not true! It is that God and Satan—you are religious? It does not matter, yes or no. Satan and God now struggle for every Frenchman's soul. First

Hovsep's eyes were those of a man who could see beyond the things you knew. . . . As he spoke, his mate kept the silver coin spinning, spinning.

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

one pulls, then the other, then both, until we know not what we do. Listen. . .

It was in Marseilles, in such a place as this, near the wharves; sand on the floor; a mean small light burning near the ceiling and gray shadows lying across the tables from the strings that once held sausages to the rafters. A place grim, miserable.

But a place for me, no? The keeper was a fat slob, but he hated Boches. We were there, Cardoux and I, one year ago on the night before Easter. Cardoux was the money man—the collector and paymaster and all-around business fellow for our outfit. Not the whole outfit; that is very big. We have men in Paris, in Normandy, in Berlin where Laval has sent them as slaves, in New York. Cardoux worked for our section, which is small but important to some few souls. Perhaps you yourself would not be here if it were not

for us. I do not know. Me, I never read the messages I brought from there to here. In my business—when there is peace I smuggle, when there is war I am a soldier; while France lay in Purgatory between peace and war, I served as best I could—in my business, the less you know the longer it takes to get your head blown off.

Sometimes we carried messages, sometimes a passenger, on the down trip. There has lain in the bilge, with the false floor pressing his nose into the stinking water, a man who was a minister of France! But our real business was food. Out of each kilo, ninety grams for men and women like ourselves, though more decent. Food so that they would not have to eat what God never intended to be eaten by the beasts of the field. Food that kept the flame going a little longer in their souls. The other tenth we sold on the black market to the rich pigs who keep themselves fat. Oil for a diesel you can buy at a price from the Boche. You can buy anything from them, if you pay what they ask. Even peace.

It was Cardoux who bought and sold, Cardoux who paid some few of us what we must have to live. He was thin, and very young, with a face the color of an altar candle and blue veins standing out on his very precious hands. You always noticed them, for when he got money his touch was a caress, as if he touched a woman. He loved women, I suppose—who does not?—but he loved money better. He had been a clerk in a house that traded in foreign exchange. On one tenth of our pitiful cargos he made a nice profit, and for a day afterward, he was happy. You would have thought he had made a merger of two railroads, squeezing out profits between them into his own pocket.

So, Cardoux and I were in this place, and to pass the time we shook dice for drinks. Did I say also that Cardoux was as lucky as he was shrewd?

It made him happy when he won and the very bad drinks were on me. The first time I said, "To your villa in Nice!" for he had shown me the big house he meant to buy when he made his fortune. The second time I said, "To our friends!" for it was hard to keep them out of your thoughts for very long.

At that he stopped with his glass half to his mouth. For only an instant he stopped and looked down. Then he drank quickly—*too* quickly.

I SEARCHED my pockets for a cigarette I did not have. If I killed him, we would lose a man we could not replace. He had his genius as I have mine. It is not every man who can play tag with the patrols in starlight and in fog for two years. He had his genius, I thought. And then Cardoux said, "Here," and offered me a cigarette from his pack.

They were bright, they were fresh; they were American Sea Stores. Cardoux grinned, looking very like a boy who has played a prank. "Planchard gave them to me," he said, "for my good will."

Planchard was one of the biggest of our black market pigs. I looked at Cardoux. The Nazis bought France from men who loved money—and if you help them keep it they make it worth your while. Also, a man grows tired of risking his neck and living like a rat. If they had bought him, there was no time to waste. It might already be too late to save the rest.

As I stood shaking my thoughts like dice in a cup, there came a voice of brass like a bugle blown far off. On my neck the cold of the harbor mist laid a wet hand. I shrugged. The voice was the crowing of a cock that should have long since have seen the inside of a stewpot. But the bird was all the baron had saved when the Boche took his lands, and the old man went hungry in his closet at the end of a cul-de-sac rather than eat him. But I could not, my friend, shrug off the night's wet hand.

So I turned, not too fast, to see who had opened the door. There were two of them and the room was big enough—but not too big—for knife work. I had gotten out of tighter spots before.

Then I felt like a fool, for they had stopped and the big one was laughing inside his chest. He made no noise when he laughed. But his beard—the most magnificent of beards, made of little black shiny rings of curling hair—danced up and down.

"Not tonight." His voice was deep and big as his chest. "Some other night I'll

fight you, for money or pleasure. Tonight I'll wet my throat and yours."

I could say nothing. If Cardoux had already betrayed, it would not be the Gestapo disguised as I do not know what. The other man was a color like chocolate, but not a Negro. I have been in many places of strange men, but I would not know where to look for any like these.

Cardoux said, "We'll shake you for the drinks," and the next I knew he was smiling as he handed the dice box to the Beard.

At once my guts grew tight. Never would Cardoux risk his few sous buying the drinks of four men. But if he had gotten money, or knew where he was going to get it. . .

I threw the dice, not seeing what came up, but it was the Beard who lost. As we waited for the glasses to be poured, he took a coin and spun it on the bar. When it fell, it rang like a chime. Cardoux's hand gathered it in with love, and he put it between his teeth. His thoughts at once retreated behind his face. I had seen the look a hundred times when he sold our goods on the market.

"It could," he said, "be worth the silver it's made of. I'll give you—"

Before Cardoux could say what he would give, or I could ask him where he would get the money, the man took back the silver piece with a hand like the paw of a bear. But his magnificent beard was laughing for him.

"I like money as well as the next, but when I like it enough to sell that piece I hope my mate here will cut my throat! Here's looking at you!"

He drank the glass of what they sold for cognac, and spat it out on the floor. His bearded lips twisted and his eyes rolled up to the ceiling. Then he smiled.

Observe that I watched these men closely, as one learns to do in my business.

HE took from his pocket a bottle—a pint with the earth still clinging to it. He waved his hand at a table and we sat, emptying our glasses as we went. He poured. We drank. I am no liquor merchant, but I have drunk my share and I am French. It was a miracle, that brandy.

"Greek?" I said.

"Greek," said the other, smaller man.

"Old," I said.

"Laid down about two years from the time they made this piece of silver."

The coin was spinning and he nodded for me to pick it up. Not round, and very heavy, bearing the face of a man with a big nose and a wreath on his bald head. *Tiberius*, it said, and some Roman numbers.

Three hundred, five hundred . . . I gave it up. What matter how long ago? Tiberius was a real Caesar when Rome was Rome.

"We worked for him once," the smaller man said, pointing with his finger at the face on the coin. "We worked for him, in a manner of speaking, down Palestine way. That's where Belshar, here, took this silver piece off a certain dead man."

"Tell the yarn, Hovsep," the Beard said. "It's three hours before we sail."

You have heard music from a boat come over the water on a dark night? It comes from nowhere on the earth. The voice of this Hovsep was like that. His eyes saw far off, too. He looked at you and beyond the back of your head, and beyond the things you knew. As he talked, the Beard kept his silver piece spinning and spinning like a little bright wheel. . .

"We follow the sea, Belshar my mate and me. Always have and always will. But when the Romans sent you some place, you went. That's how we came to be in Jerusalem, this time I'm speaking of.

"We sent our message in to the governor by the soldier at the gate and the answer came back that Pontius Pilate would give his answer tomorrow. So we went looking for fun—and found a whole city gone to church.

"It was right about this time of year, when they have the feast they call the Passover. But it was different then, because they took their religion so hard. And because of how they felt about Jerusalem, it being a holy city and their capital besides. They came in from all over Palestine. Quiet, Jerusalem was. You could hear sacrifice animals bawling from the temple up on the hill. But there were maybe three million people inside the city walls, not counting the Greeks and Syrians.

"We hunted down in one of the pockets where the houses huddle together like birds in the cold, till we found an old mate of ours. He was a sea-cook off a Phoenician galley and he'd lost an eye in some woman-snatching trade up on the Euxine Sea. But he remembered his old friends.

"He sat us down at the back of a little stone-floored room chock-a-block with goods and gear, and broke out a kid-skin of wine. He kept watching the door as he talked, and after one glass he went off to find the captain of a camel train that ran down into the desert country on the other side of Jordan River.

"He was worried because of them Jerusalem folks. God-crazy, he called them. They had holy lawyers that would argue all day about what you should eat and how you should kill it and what you shouldn't do after sundown on Sabbath. The people would gather in mobs to listen and they'd get to fighting among themselves, and sometimes they'd take it out on anybody who happened to be handy. Also, they didn't like Rome, being independent by nature and proud by religion. And to top it off, there was a holy man in the city saying some wonderful, strange things. Pilate didn't have enough men by half to put down trouble if they mutinied.

"Our old mate had made himself rich, buying from the bandits that robbed the camel trains and from the camel-drivers that stole from their masters, and now he was acting like any rich man, calling on all the gods to witness that Rome had no right to let him be robbed of his gold and gear."

"He wanted us to keep the door unbarred in case somebody wanted to leave a message, but we should keep our knives handy.

"IT LOOKED like we might get caught in it if trouble really broke there in Jerusalem, because Pilate would be too busy to give us the answer we were to take back to Rome. It was no soft berth he had: to keep the peace, collect the tribute, and keep the country in the Empire—and let the people run themselves. They still had their own laws and followed their old ways—even when those ways went against all reason. Anybody that gets the job of running another people's country is in for a rough voyage, unless he's just there for loot. He's cursed at home for what looks wrong from a distance, and cursed by the people he rules for trouble he hasn't got the power to stop.

"We drank a squirt from the wine-skin for Pilate and another to wash the dust of Palestine out of our throats, and Belshar was having a third for his girl in Cypress when a man came ramming through the door.

"He came across the room under all sail, with his head down and his heavy sandals slapping on the stone floor. I thought he was going to capsize the table but he brought up short of it and snorted through his nose. 'Give me a drink!' he said.

"I had my knife out and Belshar was moving around behind him. But the stranger didn't notice at all. 'I want a drink,' he said, 'and I can pay for it.'

"He reached in a leather bag he took out of the folds of his robe and threw down a four-drachma piece like the one Belshar has spinning on the table there.

"You could buy a whole kidskin of wine for that piece of silver, and the bag he took it from was heavy. Belshar handed him the wine and he drank and drank till it ran off his pointed beard, and he snorted through his nose. When he got through, Belshar was rolling dice on the table and smiling friendly-like.

"The drink seemed to have cleared the fellow's head. His eyes took in the heavy-bellied wine-skins around the wall, the camel-saddles and the cedar chests, with the glance of a man that's going to come back and offer less than your gear is worth. Then his eyes came back to the table and he watched Belshar, puzzled-like.

" 'What are those?' he said. 'What do you use them for?'

"He was rolling them over with his finger and I knew my first guess had been right. An up-country farmer, or a small trader used to loading his own donkey and rustling forage, would have a finger like that. And he'd be simple about dice and such.

" 'We use 'em to make money,' Belshar

said, putting down a couple of coins. 'I'll show you.'

"Belshar can make dice do anything but stand on one corner. He threw a seven. Then he threw an eight and made his point. He showed the man everything he'd need to know.

" 'You're a lucky man,' Belshar said. 'I can see it by the weight of your money-bag. If you'd like a friendly little game, now—'

"The man had drawn back. His hand was on the place where the money lay hid in his clothes and the look on his face put me in mind of the first man I ever got my knife into. He was big and I was young and I gave it a twist to make sure. This fellow's eyes had the same cloudy look of hurt, and so did his mouth. He picked up the skin and drank.

" 'You can lose, too,' he said, all of a sudden setting the skin down. 'Two against one, and you can split the money afterwards!'

"He pulled up a stool and sat down, thumping the bag onto the table.

" 'Play!' he said, and tossed one of them drachma pieces down.

"I'VE played with men half out of their heads from fighting, and some gone wild from drink and others crazed with sorrow, but I never sat in a game like the one that night. The outside body of the man was still and his voice quiet, but the thing in his mind was eating him like a rat gnawing a prisoner in his chains. 'Play!' he'd say, and lick his lips. 'Play!" As if we did him a harm by not getting our money down. We played quickly. The only other sound was the clink of coin and the rattle of dice and his breath sticking in his pipes. Nor Belshar nor I wanted words with him.

"He'd taken the dice on the first roll and was throwing them clumsy and stiff, like you'd expect. When he threw three sevens in a row we put it down to beginner's luck. But he kept right on picking up our money. Belshar finally picked up the dice and looked at them. But they were his, all right, and neither of us had another pair.

"The man banged down his fist and pushed back his stool.

" 'What's the matter with you men?' he said. 'What do you play for if you can't win?'

" 'We'd be glad to oblige,' Belshar answered him. 'But them silver pieces don't want to leave you, mister.'

"The man looked at Belshar like he was going to cut his throat. Then his eyes clouded over with that look of a man far gone in pain. He picked up the skin and drank.

" 'Play!' he said.

"Eleven times more he rolled those dice and eleven times more he picked up our money. He was the sweating kind, but I've never seen a winner sweat like him. When he picked up the money the drops stood big on his brow. His fingers trembled as he put his own pieces of silver aside, shoving them into neat rows like a money-changer.

"There were twenty-three when I signed to Belshar that I had to stop because I was cleaned out.

" 'Look,' Belshar says, reaching into his ear and pulling out the ruby he kept there to get him out of tight places, such as jail. 'I'll put this up against all you've got on the table. Only, I roll the dice.'

"The man barely looked at the ruby. He took the leather bag from around his neck. It was light by now, but you heard silver when he dropped it on the table.

" 'You'll have to take the rest, too,' he said. 'Play!'

"Belshar palmed the dice, said a prayer to some god or other, pulled his hand way back and rolled them. I'd seen him do it hundreds of times, for practice and for keeps, and the spots that came up were always what Belshar wanted them to be.

"They rolled out across the table as nice as you please. Then one stood on its corner and spun around and knocked the other one over. One-spots—snake-eyes.

"Belshar got up and took him a good big squirt from the kidskin. The man sat looking dull-like at the dice.

" 'You can't quit!' he said. 'You've got to keep on.'

" 'Mister,' I told him, 'we'd be glad to oblige. But we haven't got the price of a place to sleep. We'll have to dead-head back to Alexandria on some galley where we've got friends—or else walk.'

"Slow, slow, he reached out for our odds

and ends of gold and silver, putting them in one by one on top the ruby. Then he scooped up the silver real quick and stuffed it in like it was hot. He stood there with the bag, looking at us and wanting to give it to us. It was plain as if he'd said it. Then he slung the bag around his neck and went ploughing blindly out of the door.

"IT WAS about the fifth hour in the morning when the soldier came. He said Pilate had got to our business as soon as he could; you don't keep the Emperor's messengers waiting. But early in the morning some priests and the thugs that did their strong-arm work had come with a holy man they wanted him to crucify. Pilate questioned the man and found no fault with him. He was soft-spoken, the soldier said, and he looked wise and he wasn't afraid at all. Not of Pilate nor the priests nor the pack of people that had run to the governor's house. The holiest man, by his look, the soldier had ever seen.

"It was a custom to free a prisoner on that day, and Pilate tried to get them to take the holy man and let a thief be crucified. There was many, the soldier said, that would have been glad to do so. But they were afraid of the pack, with the priests leading it. Nobody wants to get stoned. All you could hear was, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'

"So there was nothing else for Pilate to do. Like I said, he wasn't governor of his own people. Palestine was occupied country, and he had to let them have their way or else be prepared to put down a revolt—which was always a waste of troops, the way they looked at things in Rome.

"All the people we saw as we went through the little, twisty streets were hurrying along to the Place of the Skull—to Golgotha, where they nailed men to a cross.

"We went out through the Jaffa Gate where the road to the sea begins. The winter rains were just over and the wheat fields made yellow-green splotches down the valley. Fig trees grow big around Jerusalem. Them and the oaks hung over the low stone walls by the roadside as pretty as you please. Folks were still coming up for the Passover, country folks all dressed up and faces shining. Behind us the temple stood up on the southwest hill like a big hunk of white rock, and the gold plates on the top buildings were shining, too. Over everything was the blue sky, clean and bright with the sun hanging in it. Judea's a high, dry country and the air is clear.

"We were walking along, brisk and lighter-hearted than before, when we passed the only man going our way. It was right before you came to a turn where a big oak tree threw its branches over the wall and across the road. The man was a dirty little Syrian and he gave us a wide berth for all he had a big, curved knife-handle sticking out from his robe.

"We rounded the bend and came up short on account of a man that was laying plumb in our way.

"'Dead drunk,' I said. But there was a piece of rawhide rope around his neck and the end trailing away showed a fresh break. Overhead there was another piece of the rope hanging from a limb. He was a heavy man and his robe had been white. When we got him face up we sat back on our heels and just looked. His thick neck was pinched in where the rope had choked him; his face was black from it. But it wasn't his looks that set us back; we'd seen 'em that way too often. This was the fellow we'd shot dice with the night before.

"Belshar felt of his heart. 'Not dead drunk,' he said. 'Just dead.'

He slit the moneybag that was still around the man's neck and a silver piece dropped out. Right by where it fell was a pair of sandals tied with rope. The Syrian was standing in them, and he had his big knife out.

"'You want something, mate?' says Belshar, looking up at him.

"He picked up the silver piece out of the dust without ever taking his eyes off the Syrian. The Syrian put his butcher-knife away and smiled with a mouthful of snaggle teeth.

"'No,' he said, and spread out his hands. 'Not from you, friend. Did he have anything else on him?'

I said he hadn't and the Syrian kind of sighed.

"'I WAS afraid not,' he said. 'But he might have. You can't ever tell what a crazy man will do, especially this one. At first I thought he was smart as a desert fox. He made a good trade with the priests. Thirty pieces of silver they promised if he would show them that holy man they tacked to a cross up there on The Skull this morning. This fellow lying here was one of twelve that followed the holy man around. Judas, they called him. He kept what money they had, and it was mighty little. Not worth stealing. But the holy man, he was worth something. He was in a garden when we came. I work for the high priest on jobs like that and there were plenty of us along because we expected a fight. But there was no trouble to speak of. Judas walked up to him and kissed him and we took him.

"'Judas got his money and I followed him. But he gave me the slip in the mist and then I had to go back and wait for orders. About daylight who should come to the priest's house but himself, walking like he was in a dream—a bad dream. He looked neither right nor left but went in to the priests. You know what he did? He tried to give his money back. Thirty pieces of silver!

"'They said it was no business of theirs and he came out as he went in, only he was muttering something about how he couldn't lose it and couldn't give it back and would it hang round his neck forever? I followed him around town and up the hill to the temple. He took the money out by the handful and threw it on the courtyard pavement. Of course I couldn't pick it up, so I followed him down, thinking there might be some left. I lost him in the crowd going to the crucifixion, but I thought he'd come this way. And there he lies!'

"We left him and went on our way. Every little while as we walked along, Belshar would take out the silver piece and look at it. He does so to this day."

"And always will," said the Beard.

The far-away voice stopped and in the silence came another, small but hard, like a cracked bugle blowing on some warship in the harbor. Cardoux started out of his chair, his eyes wild.

"Sit down," I said. "It's only the baron's cock practising reveille. Please go on with the tale, *monsieur*."

Then, my friend, a chill went down my spine. For no one was at the table. Where the coin had spun, a scrap of light moved

(Continued on page 161)

THE SPY-GAZERS

By

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

SAID the old walrus who was commodore of our convoy, "We have been advised, gentlemen, that several Nazi agents gained access to ships of the previous convoy by the use of forged papers and by stowing away. This convoy has just arrived in England. The voyage was made without incident."

He let that sink in.

"None of the Nazi agents in the ships committed acts of sabotage," he said. "Neither did they attempt with flares or in any other manner to reveal the position of the convoy to Nazi submarines or aircraft.

"There is a mystery here, gentlemen."

He jabbed an eye into them.

"Extreme caution is recommended on this trip. I need not go into detail. That is all."

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES DYE

The Old Man had the hatches off. He kept armed men standing by while a search party gave each jammed hold a thorough going-over.

The skippers wrinkled their brows. Our own Old Man, Cap'n Seth Cobb, scratched his scalp, licked his lips with relish and tried a peck or two at the brains of Captain Olafsen, of the *Warren*. No soap. It stayed a mystery.

Enemy agents in a convoy and not making a single pass at it!

I thought you'd be asking how a third mate, who was out in the harbor standing anchor watch in the *Margie* at the time, should know what went on at the captains' meeting. The answer is that our Old Man notified Ian MacDuin, our chief engineer. And when you tell MacDuin, you tell the world. No, MacDuin don't

talk; he just don't hear. By the time you've strained your lungs on the auld Scot fra' Brooklyn, dinna ye ken, ye've confided in all hands aboard and the cat besides.

Besides that, you'd be surprised what a third mate knows. Half the time they pretend I'm not there, like a cockroach in your beer. But brother, when an alert young officer is standing by, even if he doesn't sport as many stripes as a zebra on his coat arms, the eyes have it and the ears, too. So don't ask how I know these things. It's a gift.

Anyhow, after the captains' conference Cap'n Cobb and this skipper of the *Warren,* Cap'n Olafsen, stepped into a shore boat. As she bounced and butted through the harbor chop and the fog toward their ships, they traded grunts. Our Old Man was secretly happy about the mystery breaking up the monotony of the convoy but he didn't say much. The fellow at the oars, a slab-headed mug with all his muscle amidships, had his ears rigged all ready to listen.

The fat waterman pulled them around the stern of a thirty-thousand tonner, the *Cambodia.* She was the commodore's ship for the eastbound run. Olafsen jabbed Cap'n Cobb in the ribs. He shook his head mighty disapproving at the ex-luxury liner.

Our skipper got him. She'd stripped her turbines, the *Cambodia* had. After fiddling around a bit and changing minds about her, they'd decided to send her to England in convoy for repairs. Even disabled she could still do ten knots. They needed her plenty.

A big liner like that carries troops like a shad carries roe—by the thousands. The troops were in her now, all stowed below decks. This haul she wouldn't be thumbing her nose at the subs by hitting thirty knots but she'd still be carrying her precious load.

"It ain't the engines that're wrong in ships," Cap'n Cobb said, real forceful, thinking of Mr. MacDuin. "It's the chief engineers."

Olafsen had one, too, so he let out an extra-special grunt.

"She'll be sticking up in the center of the convoy like a bull's-eye in a target," our skipper said.

THAT was good for another grunt out of Olafsen. Then they were alongside the *Warren.* Olafsen's command didn't look like the *Cambodia.* She looked like the *Margie,* ours. Anyhow, she still got there, even if they didn't trust anything but freight and seamen in her.

Olafsen went up the ladder. Our Old Man pointed out the *Margie* to the oarsman. But the fat guy sat there, gripping the oars and staring up at the ship.

"Give way!" said Cap'n Cobb and pointed again.

"That one!" the lug said, and the thick lips under that high-sided head of his seemed to the Old Man to start curling. Maybe Cobb was sensitive about the *Margaret Blackenham.* Our *Margie* wasn't much to start with. The new bow they slapped on her after she rammed that sub hadn't improved her beauty.

Cobb was still cussing the oversized boatman under his breath as he came up our ladder. I met him at the top. Mr. MacDuin was there, too, shaking his head over a rusty plate on the deck. He never missed giving the Old Man a fair chance in case the Old Man wanted to start anything. Both these old hellions should have been born a battalion of Commandos. But they kept things happening, anyhow. And that made the *Margie* a happy ship.

The skipper looked around as if he expected Nazi agents to sprout out of the steel deck. He *harrumphed* importantly.

"Mr. Leet, my compliments to the mate and I'd like to see him at once," he said to me. He squared off toward Mr. MacDuin and opened up.

I hustled. The mate was on the forecastle head with the carpenter. Before I could get back, the two of them were at it. The chief engineer was overhanging the little Old Man like a toppling cliff. He was going to search his own engine room with his own men, d'ye ken. He knew how the Old Man relished a mystery and a chance to solve it and save the convoy, but he went off into medical terms to describe the skipper's attitude toward spies. There's nothing like a doctor's book of words to extinguish enthusiasm. When we call a guy a hero, they call him a gland case. The Old Man resented the chief's offside play hot and loud.

Just the usual skirmishing. Back of it you could see that each of them was set on exploding that mystery. Glory stuff.

The Nazis might have figured out a real fast one. They were needing something dramatic just about then to put on the Berlin radio with trumpet toots. Some kind of kick in the pants for our convoy, if it was hard enough, might do. Doping out what would be a real trick. Last time the skipper and the chief had gone spy-catching they'd gotten too busy watching each other to put in much time on the Nazi. But this time it would be different. That's what they thought. I didn't. Not with them already sizing each other up, like a couple of cats on a fence. It was like old times again.

That chat on the main deck wasn't one of their best goes. Cap'n Cobb was in too much of a hurry to get the search parties working before dark.

The crew were poor prospects as suspects. They'd all signed with her before. No passengers. That eliminated forged papers. The Old Man had to fall back on stowaways.

"Five bucks at evens we don't find any spies," Jeff Knight, the mate, muttered in my ear.

"Ten bucks at evens you don't find any suckers," I said.

Well, we went after her from chain lockers to steering engine house. Nothing. The Old Man stamped into the engine room stiff as a fiddle. All I've got to say about that is that I never before saw a puddle of engine oil lying around on MacDuin's plates. The slide the Old Man did would have made an acrobat jealous.

"It's fair dangerous, d'ye see, for an inexperienced mon to come parading into an engine room," MacDuin bawled as the Old Man got up. "I have to reporrt to ye, sir. No pairsons without business here." He paused. "Barrin' yerself."

"Thank you, Mr. MacDuin," said the skipper. He pulled the seat of his pants loose from his hide. He said it mildly. The chief was floored. He removed his watch-cap and looked into it fixedly. He wasn't looking for Nazis or anything smaller in the same category; he was using it for a crystal ball trying to see what the Old Man would do.

Cobb went on with the search in person. It isn't often you'll see a skipper working but, except for occasional shots at being dignified and useless, our Old Man got around like a bad smell. He had the commodore's warning prancing around in his skull. All he did about MacDuin was to send a mess attendant with a mop down to the engine room with an offer to help keep it cleaned up. That boy certainly made knots coming up the ladder again.

A WHILE later on deck the Old Man got his mind off his wet pants in a hurry. Something started over in the *Warren*. There was a swirl of yelling pursuit across the well deck into the working alleyway. A gun cracked. There were sounds of a scuffle. A couple of the crew helped a wounded man up the ladder to the captain's office.

A picket boat came alongside her. Navy men swarmed aboard. After a while they left with a handcuffed prisoner, a husky-looking mug with a small, blond head.

"Hum!" said the captain to Jeff Knight. "I had a queer idea the stowaway would turn out to be the boatman who put us aboard."

He took a hitch along the deck. You could see by the set of his narrow shoulders that he didn't like the old *Warren* having a Nazi on board when nobody showed on the *Margie*. How was he going to save the convoy if they didn't give him any raw material?

"Surely they wouldn't have overlooked this ship," he said out loud. "It's incomprehensible!"

"It's mair na' that," said MacDuin. "It's practically intelligent."

He took a turn himself and stopped to poke a foot at a rusty plate. "Of course, the spy himself could have refused to risk it," he said, much louder than the skipper. "A heavy-footed mon might fall clean through her deck. Aye, that's it!"

Jeff Knight, who was responsible for her deck, bit a piece out of his upper lip. "The ship's just a worn-out wart attached to his beautiful engine," he said. "That subway Scot!"

Perhaps it was the capture of the *Warren's* spy that hung us up that night with our hook still down in unnamed Canadian mud. Nothing happened beyond me catch-

ing cain for not taking in the boarding ladder. We didn't get the high-sign and go out through the submarine nets till dawn.

As we split the gray mists heading down harbor the Old Man let go a yelp. He stabbed with his finger to starboard. A rowboat, empty, with the oars shipped, was adrift there.

"I know that split counter," he said aloud. "That's the boat that fat lubber used to put Cap'n Olafsen and me aboard. And now it's abandoned!"

He scowled at me. I iced up fast, thinking of that boarding ladder I'd left hanging overside. He didn't jump me. But I knew he'd be searching the *Margie* again, now.

He did, twice. Once in daylight, while we were milling around getting in formation in the convoy and once that night, bumbling along in a Grand Banks fog.

The morning search was more thorough. The Old Man had the hatches off her. He kept armed men standing by on deck while a party gave each jammed hold a going-over.

"Is it a microbe he's mislaid?" Pop Gormley, the boatswain, growled.

Cobb was just as thorough with the rest of the ship.

MacDuin nearly wore out the bearings in his neck shaking his head over the folly of all this. He followed the search party around to do it.

"He's got a spanner in his pocket and he's doing his scoffing in the right spot to quietly corner any Nazi the gang happens to flush," Jeff Knight said. "I'd be willing to bet—"

His eye turned on me with naive invitation. I could feel a five-dollar bill flutter in my pocket. I left. But it was true: MacDuin had worked out the angles. He was set to grab the spy and the glory whether the gang unearthed one in the forecastle or Lower Five. Other ships in that convoy were being combed that day. And though the commodore in the *Cambodia* sent only routine stuff with his signal flags, blinker and loudspeaker, it was all snappier than usual. The convoy was jumpy. The destroyers went dashing around like porpoises and the planes were flying low, trying to horn in on the doings aboard the ships.

The night search was the real darling. It was supposed to be surreptitious, to take our Nazi unawares. Did you ever start getting surreptitious in a blacked-out ship on a moonless night, thick with fog? It don't always work out so secretive. Nobody in the convoy could have missed a word of what Pop Gormley said right after he stumbled against a seaman having a quiet drink out of a smuggled bottle at the head of the forecastle ladder. Pop went down the ladder juggling the practically invisible bottle by sheer instinct, pushing the A.B. in the face with one foot and giving voice.

When he hit, he took all that the steel well deck would give him in a last-second try at wrapping himself around that quart. The bottle just trickled out of his arms and tinkled gently. Busted!

It's that sort of thing that breaks up good men's morale in the convoy run. Difficult as it was, Pop covered the subject masterfully. But it wasn't surreptitious.

That was just incidental. The real wallop of that night search took place 'way aft. The secret searchers, formed in line of skirmishers, were falling over every obstacle that studs the deck of a ship and painting a black night blue. The Old Man changed tactics. He left them and slipped along aft to the quiet end of the ship His idea was that the Nazi stowaway might feel safe to shift his hiding place in the stern under cover of all the row forward.

MR. MACDUIN didn't miss the maneuver. He went gliding along behind the skipper. He didn't make any more noise than one wee drappy of oil following another wee drappy of oil. But he closed up tighter as the Old Man eased around the starboard corner of the steering engine house.

Then MacDuin changed his mind. If anybody was around by the taffrail the chief's play should be to circle to port and let the Old Man herd him right into his arms. He reversed course quickly. And as he turned he sensed a shadow that had been shifting along behind him. The shadow backed abruptly.

If MacDuin had dropped a dime overside in nine hundred fathoms he couldn't

have yelled louder. He dived forward. The shadow melted. MacDuin's headlong plunge, complicated by an eyebolt in the deck, sent him sprawling. And over him —almost—went our skipper.

The skipper moved almost as fast on his chest, chin and skull as he had on his feet. I know he did, because I was the shadow. And I was making knots myself. Even if I hadn't known that my duty was elsewhere, that wild Hieland wail—or maye he'd learned it from the Dodger fans on his native heath—would have made me burn the deck.

Next instant I was safe back with the search party. Cap'n Cobb and MacDuin were playing beanbag with the blame for the spy's escape. It did not seem the hot moment for me to go back and undeceive them. When a skipper has just traveled the full length of the afterdeck on his nose, he is in no mood to be bothered by a talkative third mate.

"Nobody likes a gabby third mate," I told myself. "Not even me. Besides, this experience will keep them on their toes"—I kept noses out of it—"for the good of the ship and the convoy."

It did. I passed up the credit for it. All hands wouldn't have liked me. They got real tired of looking for Nazis. Also we got double doses of fire drills, abandon ship and the rest of it.

We were slogging along through regular North Atlantic weather. We had the westerlies, which makes the run to England downhill. But at that, one day even the *Cambodia* was doing nose stands when some of those eastbound graybacks rolled under her. Big seas, those babies, and going places with a hint of white curling along on their crests. That's to make you wonder just how badly you'd be pooped if one decided to break just astern. Man, you can usually do with glue on the seat of your pants and hooks on your feet in the *Margie*. But—

Eastbound. Yes; we had corvettes and destroyers and some air protection and the routine scares and cursings from the commodore. Formation troubles. Some of those corvette captains handle big language for the size of their ships.

But there was a feel about that convoy. You could sense it. Nazi agents in the last convoy and no action out of them! At least one Nazi bagged in this convoy. Mystery.

You could heel-and-toe it on the bridge for your full trick and watch the skipper and the chief still chewing away on that mystery. They got no further on it than if it had been a wad of gum. They just couldn't stop chewing on it.

Then a real sensation broke. Jeff Knight, relieving the second mate at the end of the afternoon watch, came up on the bridge with his jaw sagging like an overloaded cargo net.

"The chief's got into a boiler suit," he said.

Knutsen, the second, laughed with me.

"Uhuh!" I said. "And Cap'n Cobb's got a halo hanging on his starboard horn."

"It's true," Jeff said. "Hauser"—he was MacDuin's first assistant—"just passed the word. In a boiler suit. Having a look around for himself."

It didn't sound credible. MacDuin's theory was that the first assistant engineer was in charge of the engine room. The second assistant engineer was in charge of the boiler room. He, Ian MacDuin, was in charge of the two engineers. For that job he needed only a tongue. And he wore a spotless blue serge uniform to show up the Old Man, who ran to a peajacket with more ventilation around the elbows than was conventional. And now MacDuin was in a boiler suit!

From the bridge I saw an uneasy mess attendant and a fireman go aft on the fiddley deck and look hard at Number Two lifeboat. Down on the well deck Pop Gormley had his hand on the deck, feeling the beat of the engines with his eyes squinted shut.

"She's shaking no worse than her habit, boys," he said. "But that chief would be knowing hours ahead if her engines were planning to waltz off of the bedplates."

"Stow that, bo'sun," I said. "MacDuin's just searching for spies."

"And it's you that think so, sir," Pop said. "A sorry day for the *Margie* when that one climbs into monkey pants."

BUT in spite of this guff the *Margie* kept going. She held her place off on the starboard beam of the limping *Cambodia* with never a squawk out of her engines.

MacDuin was looking for spies below. Even in the shaft tunnel and empty tanks. That was the truth of it. What did he find? Odd jobs for his men.

With every passing day of hoofing it eastward, without even the boom of a depth charge or a bark of an AA gun to break the monotony, the mystery was eating deeper into MacDuin.

At that, though he didn't upset the ship except with search parties, the bite was on the Old Man even worse. Competition. There was no peace and quiet on the bridge. Any minute the skipper would edge into the after corner of your eye. I'd watch him peer fore and aft or stare across the water at the boat-studded side of the *Cambodia* and her soldier-jammed decks. Or he'd look to the starboard bow to study the *Warren*, Captain Olafsen's old hooker, or one of the other ships nearby.

MacDuin would show up to snort derisively.

"Spies!" he said one day as if to some acquaintance back in Flatbush. "Aye! The last shipmaster I knew afflicted with

Halfway down the ladder to the well deck, Jeff took off, feet first. I saw our visitor go running aft as he landed.

similar trouble specialized on wee red widgets that danced on the rim of his cup o' tea. They didn't notice anything odd aboot him as lang as he held command."

He dived below. More work for the black gang.

Yes, both of them kept detecting and clewing and clawing to beat the Dutch. They never got to first base. And the uneasier they felt, the closer MacDuin would haunt the engine room and the Old Man would perch on the bridge.

They even got so hipped they didn't spend much time watching each other. Finally if they wanted to exchange a few crisp words they'd use the voice tube, for mostly the skipper was rooted at one end of it, in the wheelhouse, and MacDuin at the other, down on the platform in the engine room.

We were getting close to where we were going.

The skipper borrowed a terrific book about Nazi agents from Etienne, our steward, and sweated through it. Then he complained to Etienne. "The fellow who wrote that seems to think a Nazi spy has three brains and six fiendish hands," he said. "Bunk, man!"

You could tell he was figuring that he had no brain at all.

"Brain? What for?" Jeff Knight said as I was relieving to stand my eight-to-midnight. "All the skipper of a freighter needs is something to sit down on. The mate does the work."

The Old Man came back into the wheelhouse just then to nurse the duck-bumps that the spy book had raised along his backbone. He kept pulling away at his knobby little chin. The tale passed around the ship was that the Old Man's whaling and sailing ancestors out of New Bedford had worn goatees. It was his ancestor's whiskers that he searched for when he was in a bad jam.

"Where's MacDuin?" Jeff Knight asked.

At eight in the evening you'd usually see the chief parading the deck in his spotless blues, Easter Sunday style. But he wasn't in sight this night. And he hadn't been in sight the night before. I jerked a finger toward the engine room.

"Watching," I said.

Jeff laughed. "Neither of 'em could detect a hot bee on the end of his nose," he said, and blew.

The ship settled down after a while for the night. It was past the dusky time the subs love, when they can see you but you can't see their periscopes needling through the seas. We hadn't had a whiff of a U-boat or a raider or even a Kurier plane looking for some place to lay eggs.

I got to figuring how many eyes in that convoy right then were combing that black sea and black sky for trouble. All of them looking outward on every bearing for whatever deviltry might come sneaking up over the horizon. More than the lookouts and the officers on watch; there'd be the soldiers looking over the *Cambodia*, the black gang men off duty, stewards, A.B.'s, radio men, gunners, besides the bunch on the destroyers escorting us. Queer thinking for a third mate, hey? I was always a pretty deep sort of a gent when bored.

I started walking off my watch, like it was a bad case of indigestion. The Old Man didn't give me any trouble.

Somewhere behind the clouds there was part of a moon. You didn't need any towing spar cutting white gashes in the sea before the bow to help you follow the dark ship ahead. You could see the black loom of a quarter of the ships in the convoy. Black ships, bunched against trouble, tailing along in gray, hissing wakes.

The *Cambodia*, close over to port, stuck up like a moving mountain. A juicy target she was, limping along with the troops packed tight in her. Once the Nazis had reported her sunk and got the raspberry for it. They'd have to get deep into the convoy to put any steel into her this run.

While I was standing in the port wing looking at her, the skipper drifted up behind me. He looked at her, too.

"She was due to sail in the last convoy, but didn't make it," the Old Man said and I didn't kid myself he was talking to me. "The last convoy—but didn't make it. And they had agents planted in that convoy, too. Agents that did nothing."

HE stood still a second and you could fairly hear him cudgeling the old brains. He gave the shadowy well deck a hard eye. No lurking Nazis. He shook his head and tramped wearily to the wheelhouse again.

His brains were out for a beer and his

back was to the wall. He wasn't quitting. But then in a way he couldn't. Because he hadn't even made a start on that mystery he'd welcomed. And he knew it. I could fairly see the other amateur mystery-juggler down on the plates standing straight as a gun, blasting the ship and all hands with hot, black eyes under those great furry eyebrows. He hadn't made a start either.

Jeff Knight was right. As detectives and spy busters those two were a couple of unlaid eggs. I was ashamed of them.

And then, toward midnight, things started. Fast, desperate, but not dramatic. Man, oh man! Right when I was thinking of my bunk.

The Old Man, without stirring a foot, swung his head around to starboard. For some reason my hair stood up on my head. He stared, stone still. A full second, maybe. Then his right hand snapped to the engine room telegraph. He jerked the brass handle.

Zip! Zip! Zip! Just like that. And then instantly, *zing!* From the engine room below came the answering jingle of the telegraph. That would be MacDuin, glowering beside the engine controls.

I didn't know what was going on. A cold breeze was blowing along my vertebrae. I galloped in from the wing of the bridge. It was plain that what the Old Man had signaled to MacDuin was "Stand by!" And what MacDuin had answered was "Standing by!" But why?

The Old Man didn't say a word to me. The helmsman was gawking at him, dim as a ghost at dawn in the light of the binnacle. I was gawking at the skipper, too. I followed his eyes.

He was staring off to starboard, at Captain Olafsen's ship, the *Warren*. She was broad on our bow. It took me a second to understand.

The *Warren* was off her course. She was no longer following the ship ahead of her. She was swinging hard. Her head was turning to port. She was cutting square across our bow. She had been ahead of us in her column. Her course was taking her between the stern of the ship we'd been following and our bow.

She was raising cain with the ranks of ships. She was at right angles to the rest of the fleet. And coming!

We heard a high-pitched shout from her above all the rumble and swash of the ships. Somebody was excited. And then I saw a little wink of orange light from her wheelhouse. I heard, almost at once, the crack of the pistol that had winked.

"Somebody fired a shot in her wheelhouse, sir," I yelled.

"Left ten degrees!" the Old Man said to the quartermaster. The engine telegraph jingled again under his hand. He looked to port now. I gulped as I saw what he was looking at.

The *Warren* wasn't heading to hit us. She was passing across our bow. Straight as a gun, she was pointing at the *Cambodia*. Our engines quickened beat in a hurry as MacDuin answered below.

The *Warren* hadn't far to go. Again a gun cracked in her wheelhouse. A man screamed. Lots more noise. And from the convoy the sudden blast of whistles and wail of sirens. An unholy row.

YES, by then I knew what was up. Ships are close together in a convoy, mighty close. A guy with a gun in the wheelhouse and maybe another guy with a gun in the engine room are all that is wanted to throw one ship into another. There's no time to beat them. All they need is command of wheel and engine for scant seconds. And scant seconds go fast in a black ship when nobody knows what in blazes is up. Simple!

They were going to get the crowded *Cambodia*—cut her down. It was no trick at all against a big ship that couldn't dodge better than eight knots.

No wonder the Nazis hadn't acted when the *Cambodia's* sailing was postponed till our convoy. She was a prize worth waiting for. And now they had her, cold!

"Steady as you go!" the Old Man said to the helm.

Three ships, and two converging on the same spot. But now we were moving, too. We were picking up way. The skipper had her pointing to cut in between the old *Warren* and the *Cambodia*. The big trooper was beginning—just beginning—to swing off to port. We were getting close. We were knifing up, bow and bow, with the *Warren*. MacDuin was waking up the mill. The *Warren* looked big in the dark, that close. Our engines really churned.

"On your knees!" the Old Man said to the helmsman. "Down beside that telegraph! Bow lookout, there! Get aft!"

He dropped down himself, with his fingers reaching up to the telegraph handle. Before his second knee hit the deck somebody in the *Warren's* wheelhouse started knocking holes in our windows. They sound louder when they're aimed at you. The *Margie* lunged up alongside the *Warren.*

We sideswiped. It was quite a jolt. Our starboard bow and her port bow met. You could call it glancing if you want. But when thousands of tons of steel meet the same, brother, it isn't glancing to me! It's a wallop, followed by a bone-jolting, grinding mess. And peppered with lead.

The Old Man was still talking calmly to our jittery helmsman. He was swinging into the *Warren,* pushing her bow around, riding her off, deflecting her aim from the *Cambodia.*

I'D about forgotten the *Cambodia.* I jerked my head around. She was looming over us to port. High. Towering.

She'd managed to turn a bit and was going astern with her screws.

It was just we and the *Warren* that were clicking and rumbling—so far. . . . Time was petrified, like me.

"By Peter, she's clear, sir!" I said.

"Watch for another ship!" the Old Man yelled. But nothing else mixed in.

Jeff Knight came galloping up the ladder. By that time our two locked ships were moving ahead of the *Cambodia.* On the *Warren* a lot was going on. More shots. Shots answering, now. Then a bit of silence. More yells. Questions. No shooting. That part was over.

I opened my mouth wide for some air now that nobody was so likely to put lead in it. We were slackening our pressure against the *Warren.* I stared at our bow, wondering if it was lopsided.

A big, vague shadow of gray moved up there. Our lookout? No. Somebody had slid down from the higher bow of the *Warren* onto our dark forecastle head. It was just a shadowy figure, but real.

"Look!" I yelled.

"Go get him!" Cap'n Cobb said. "Take this! Both of you go."

He shoved a gun at Jeff Knight. The old wart had been lugging a gun! Jeff went off, with me on his heels. Halfway down the ladder to the well deck Jeff took off, feet first. I saw the man running aft go down as Jeff landed. Then I landed, too, mostly on Jeff. But he was flat—our visitor from the *Warren.*

"Good work!" the Old Man called down. "Bring him up here!"

You understand that all hell was blazing in the convoy. Ships churning around, missing the *Cambodia* and us, destroyers sailing in, whistles blasting, even guns, though I wouldn't know why. On the speakers the commodore was ordering everything to keep away from the troopship.

All that was just a backdrop for us. Jeff Knight shoved his prisoner up the ladder and I followed with an empty gun he'd dropped.

The Old Man put a screened flashlight carefully to the face of the prisoner.

It was the slab-headed waterman who had rowed him and Cap'n Olafsen out to their ships. A nasty scowler, he was, too. The *Warren* must have had a third mate on anchor watch who paid even less attention to a boarding ladder over the side than I did. And they'd bunched their Nazis on one ship, unless there were other agents on ships too far away to try to cut down the trooper.

"So I've caught you—finally," said the Old Man. He sounded sort of tired.

Jeff Knight cleared his throat—quite a squawk of protest. He didn't get any further. He never opened his mouth to kick about that "I" stuff. Not until later, that is.

The Old Man looked at me.

"My compliments to Mr. MacDuin," he said, "and can he lend me a pair of handcuffs?"

I got the chief on the tube. What he called me was really amazing.

We got straightened out and under way with plenty of questions answered by Morse lamp.

The *Cambodia,* with no holes in her, lugged her troops along off our port bow. Our damage was above the waterline. Sure of that, the Old Man turned in. He'd been light on sleep.

(Continued on page 159)

TRAITOR

By M. V. HEBERDEN

Brandon felt nothing now. He was watching a scene that he seemed to have watched before, long ago, and which he had always known he would watch again. It was all familiar. . . .

UNKNOWN

THE STORY THUS FAR:

WHEN a leak develops in the underground network MAJOR MICHAEL BRANDON of British Intelligence had set up to aid the Allies after France's surrender, Brandon's chief, COLONEL SMITHSHAND, orders him to find the leak—apparently among the higher-ups—and plug it. After conferring with RODOPIN, ex-publisher and advisor to British Intelligence on French matters, and with ST. PAUL, liaison man between the underground and the French in London, Brandon and LIEUTENANT FRANK KNIGHT, young American working with B.I., are dropped by parachute in northwestern France—Zone One of the underground—where the trouble seems to be. They have nine days to discover and remove the traitor and issue instructions to the underground concerning a forthcoming large-scale Commando raid.

As a precaution against possible betrayal, Brandon takes Knight to the home of PAPA CIBAULT, tobacco-shop pro-

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

prietor who forges credentials for the underground, and has Knight's picture and description transferred to his own papers, obtaining for himself the identification papers of one PIERRE DESGRANGES, mathematics professor of Rouen. He sends Knight to the JOSSERAND farm, center of the underground's courier service to London, where Knight meets PAPA and MAMA JOSSERAND, and their sons-in-law, CHARLES BUISSON, LUCIEN AMIARD and ACHILLE DUPRÉ, and learns that the Gestapo is watching the Josserand house. Brandon, in the meantime, makes contact with MAURICE ARNAUDET, district chief in the underground, but he is unable to furnish any clue to the traitor.

That evening Brandon goes to see ANDREE SANTRIEUL, with whom he fell in love while organizing the underground and who is now working with both British Intelligence and the underground. She is now a singer at the Café Persan and mistress of COLONEL EHRWAHLT, local Nazi commandant. Her back is scarred from an attack perpetrated on her by irate townsmen because of her convincing portrayal of a collaborationist. She has no information about the leaks either, and mentions that a man named DAUDET has recently been through the district checking up for St. Paul, but he was also unable to discover their source. Before Brandon leaves the café, he meets Colonel Ehrwahlt, to whom he is introduced as "Pierre Desgranges," an old friend of Andrée's.

When he returns to his hotel that evening, he learns from Knight that everyone in the Josserand household has been arrested on suspicion and that the Gestapo is offering a 50,000-franc reward for "Michael Brandon, English spy, dead or alive." Later that night, the Gestapo pick Brandon up and take him to headquarters for questioning. After fifteen hours of grilling, he convinces them that he is really "Pierre Desgranges," but before releasing him, CAPTAIN BRUNDT and CAPTAIN RITTER order him to try and find out from Andrée if she is working with the underground. He learns that they suspect her but that Colonel Ehrwahlt has forbidden them to proceed against her without proof. On his way out of the headquarters, he hears a radio announcement that ten hostages will be shot at midnight the following day if the English spy has not been surrendered to the authorities by that time.

Returning to his hotel, Brandon learns that Gestapo men are waiting in the lobby for Knight and manages to intercept him outside. Then the major returns to the Café Persan where he arranges with Andrée to steal a list of the Nazi spies in the underground from Colonel Ehrwahlt.

Calling together the underground unit leaders, Brandon reads them the list of traitors, among whom is Charles Buisson. To convince the men of the authenticity of his list, he arranges to meet Buisson secretly. Buisson informs the Gestapo, who proceed to arrest the informer when it becomes evident that this was a frame-up. Convinced, the underground leaders carry out a purge of the other traitors on thel ist and disperse according to prearranged plan.

Realizing, however, that these traitors are only small fry, Brandon arranges with Andrée for her to try to worm the identity of the Nazis' London contact from Captain Brundt.

On the pretext of reporting "Desgranges'" seeming interest in the de Gaullist movement, Andrée goes to Gestapo headquarters. As she chats with Brundt, Captain Ritter enters and announces that he has just received a telegram which proves that Andrée is a member of the underground. He is elated to find her with Brundt, whom he envies and dislikes.

PART III

BRUNDT'S stubby hand clenched on the paper and he flung it savagely down onto the floor. "You dirty little—" he began, glaring at Andrée.

"The colonel will be grateful to you now for your warnings," interposed Ritter coolly.

Some of the passion died out of Brundt's face. At least he would have that satisfaction. He went hurriedly to the desk, reaching out his hand for the telephone, then he withdrew it. "I'll wait a little," he said.

Andrée Santrieul sat very still. Somehow, some way, they had found out. She had been expecting it for more than two

years and it was almost a relief now that it had happened. She had a curiously empty feeling inside. It wasn't exactly fear. She had been afraid so often, at first, but not for a long time now.

"Stand up," barked Brundt.

"Why did she come this afternoon, I wonder?" murmured Ritter reflectively.

"That's something I mean to find out," replied Brundt. "Why did you report Desgranges?" he demanded.

"Why shouldn't I report someone who seems about to engage in activities detrimental to the state?" she retorted. Until Brundt actually told her the accusation against her that was contained in the message, she might as well stick to her story.

"For one of the key men, or I suppose I should say, women, in an underground organization," suggested Ritter smoothly, "that seems a peculiar way to encourage recruits."

"Are you suggesting that I'm involved in the underground activities?" she demanded. She must make them tell her what the charge was.

"For a long time we've been aware that they had a key man whose identity was known only to the chiefs. We've been aware, too, that it was someone who had wormed his way into our confidence." There was an evil triumph about Brundt. "You were very curious about our agent in London. He's found out your identity."

So it was from the London end. Brandon had been right. Unless, of course, the man whom St. Paul had sent to investigate the leaks had been the traitor. "You've no proof of that," she said steadily.

"I'll get all the proof I need." Brundt laughed shortly and returned to his question. "Why did you report Desgranges?"

"I've told you."

His fist came up and hit her squarely on the mouth. It was a powerful blow that cut her lip and sent her reeling backwards. He followed it with another and she fell. "Perhaps that'll teach you not to lie."

"Better not be too rough with her—at first, at any rate," came Ritter's voice.

Andrée's head was ringing and for a minute her eyes wouldn't focus; her jaw felt as if it were dislocated and she was sure her front teeth were loose. The polished wood floor was hard against her cheek. Something was tickling the end of her nose. It was the message that Brundt had flung down. Slowly she started to raise herself up and got one hand onto it, straightening it out. For a second before he hauled her roughly to her feet, her eyes photographed the typewritten lines. She had done what she came to do: she had found out the name of the London traitor. But it wasn't going to do any good. She wouldn't be able to tell Brandon now.

"Why did you report him?"

She wiped a trickle of blood from her chin. "Because as a fanatical would-be conspirator, Pierre Desgranges is less convincing than you would be as a Christian missionary," she answered. "I knew him too well before. The whole idea of guerrilla fighting is ridiculous and shocking to him. I knew he had been questioned for hours here, knew that he had been let go. Then he comes to me and suddenly announces that he wants to join the underground movement and fight, and can I tell him to whom to go? I am not quite a fool!"

"I WAS thinking the Fräulein must know the zone chief," said Ritter. He appeared to regard the matter of Desgranges as a side issue. "Also, possibly she would know where to find this Major Brandon."

"That cursed Englishman!" snarled Brundt.

"Quite so. The men have searched eleven places where he was reported to be and not found anyone answering to his description."

"The babble of that fool, Charles Buisson," snorted Brundt. "He would say anything that he thought we wanted to hear."

"I did not give the orders to have him beaten," retorted Ritter and added, "The other one died. That was not clever."

"How was I to know Vario had a weak heart?"

Ritter made an impatient movement. "It is the first rule to have a doctor examine a prisoner. Then these accidents do not happen."

"I don't think he knew anything, anyway."

"Possibly not. But alive, we could at

least have found out. Also alive, he might have proved a useful argument. Dead, he is valueless."

"He was valueless either way. That whole business in the empty shop this morning was done deliberately to make fools of us."

"I wonder," said Ritter slowly. "I think there was more behind it than that."

"That's something my boys will find out from her." Brundt jerked his head in the direction of Andrée.

"I think you had better be careful." Ritter looked at her judicially. "Her dossier mentioned four months in a hospital. You don't want another accident."

"You needn't worry! I'll show you what that was!" Brundt pulled her roughly towards him and, thrusting his hands inside the neck of her dress, ripped it down to the waist. "Turn around." He pointed to her scarred back. "That's what her own people did to her."

"So that's why she doesn't turn around and show her back on the stage," murmured Ritter. He walked around behind her, looking thoughtfully at the network of scars. "You have little cause to love your fellow countrymen, Fräulein," he said. "They messed you up pretty badly. It cannot have been a pleasant experience. And they did it because you were the commandant's mistress, because you performed for our soldiers." He thought for a moment and asked curiously, "Why didn't you tell them the real reason you were doing it?"

"I think you know the answer to that without my telling you." Andrée still felt the blow that Brundt had dealt her and tried to steady herself against the edge of the desk. Whatever they were going to do to her, she wished they'd get it over. It couldn't last very long.

"You know that death is the penalty for what you've done?" went on Ritter.

"Yes."

"Colonel Ehrwahlt won't be able to help you now."

"He won't try," she answered with a faint smile.

"No one can help you except yourself. If you tell us what you know, it'll be a lot easier for you."

"No."

Brundt swung around. "She'll think differently about matters after a few hours."

Ritter sighed a trifle and lighted another cigarette. He didn't suffer fools gladly and Brundt belonged in that category. "If she wouldn't tell the men who did that to her"—he waved the long holder towards her back—"because she knew it would put a stop to her usefulness, she isn't going to betray them to spare herself now."

Brundt pushed the buzzer under his desk. "I'll make her tell everything she knows." He looked up at the man who came in. "Take this prisoner downstairs. Get Sergeant Mendel and four men. I'll be down in a minute. Oh—and send for Dr. Roth. Perhaps that will satisfy you, Captain Ritter," he said as he followed the guard and Andrée to the door. "I'll make the little trollop sorry she was born."

CAPTAIN RITTER watched him go, then slowly returned to his own office. He drew a sheet of paper towards him and started to write. It was a confidential report. ". . . of Captain Brundt's pre-occupation with women," he wrote in part. "While this in itself would be harmless, in his case the obsession interferes with clear thinking. The streak of sadism which results tends towards a misdirected and blundering cruelty which, instead of serving the interests of the state, merely defeats its own ends." He wrote on for a long time, referring every now and again to some notes he had in front of him, and very little of what he wrote was complimentary. He was just putting ". . . his vanity and craving for power result in an inability to work with and a jealousy of his superiors. . ." when the door flew open and Colonel Ehrwahlt entered.

"Where's Brundt?"

"I'll find out, sir." Ritter rose and started to the door.

"He isn't in his office. I understand he's ordered the arrest of Mademoiselle Santrieul."

"Yes, sir. We had an advice from Berlin. Our London agent exposed her. It seems that she is the spy whose existence has been known to us for some time, but whose identity had been kept a closely guarded secret."

"Where is she?"

"I think the captain is questioning her. Downstairs, sir."

BEFORE he'd finished the sentence, Ehrwahlt had gone. Ritter smiled and followed. Colonel Ehrwahlt was hit hard. It would be interesting to see what happened.

As he reached the basement passage, he heard Ehrwahlt's thundering tones. "We'll see who's got the authority here. I give you ten seconds to have your men cut her loose, or I'll have you shot for insubordination. Perhaps a court martial will decide that I overstepped my authority, but it won't do you any good."

Brundt's face was suffused with crimson under the dark skin. He swallowed and seemed literally to be trying to swallow his rage. Then abruptly he ordered Sergeant Mendel to untie the prisoner. The doctor, whose worn face had a deliberate blankness on it, stepped forward.

"Why wasn't I notified?" demanded Ehrwahlt.

"I was going to let you know as soon as I had a confession, sir," said Brundt sullenly.

"I'll deal with you later," said the colonel. "Is she conscious, doctor?"

The doctor looked around with some surprise. "Oh, no. She's been unconscious for some time."

"Why didn't you tell me, imbecile?" roared Brundt.

"You didn't ask me," replied the doctor.

Again Ritter smiled. It was so like Brundt, in his blind fury, trying to ease his hurt vanity, to have his men continue to torture an unconscious woman. Ritter was a hard man, even a cruel one, but he did demand that cruelty should serve some useful purpose. There was no limit to what he would do to a prisoner if he thought the prisoner might tell him something he needed to know, but he wouldn't lay a hand on a man who he thought either couldn't, or never would, tell him anything.

"Bring her around. I must speak to her," said Ehrwahlt.

"Suppose you take the forces of destruction outside," suggested the doctor. "I'll call you. You men," he ordered two of the police, "lift her onto the bunk. Carefully. That's it."

In the passage an orderly came up to Brundt. "Pierre Desgranges is waiting for you, sir."

"I've no use for him now," snapped Brundt. "Or—yes. Have him wait."

"I want to talk to Desgranges," said the colonel.

The orderly disappeared. The sergeant had not been dismissed and, with his four men, he stood in uncomfortable silence as far from Brundt as he could manage. Brundt's lips formed words which were inaudible, but easily guessed. Ehrwahlt stood with his back to them all, his face set, the lips a stiff line, as if he could not trust himself to speak. Ritter watched interestedly.

Inside the cell, Doctor Roth applied restoratives. After a bit, Andrée began to whimper a little, then opened dull, bloodshot eyes that rested on him in frightened bewilderment. At last she recognized him and whispered, "Can't you give me something. . ."

He shook his head and pointed up to the corner of the ceiling, then laid a finger on his lips. She understood and was silent, but her eyes, filled with pain and fear, pleaded with him. He looked around to the door and hurriedly filled a hypodermic. After another nervous glance to the door, he took her arm. She moaned a little as he moved it, and he frowned. It took a good deal to make Andrée cry out; he remembered that from the four months she had been under his care. He pushed the plunger home and watched her quivering lips form a thank-you that she dared not say. He got up and called the colonel.

Ehrwahlt stood beside the bunk looking down into her face as if she were a stranger. And to him, at that moment, she was. Perhaps it was the ravages of suffering that lent to her features a tempered strength which he had not noticed before. And there was a remoteness in the green eyes as if she were already too far away for him to reach her.

"Is this true?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then—" he began, and stopped.

"I am sorry, Joachim. You have been kind," she said slowly. It was difficult to talk.

He stood stiffly as if at salute. "You will be shot at six A.M. with the hostages,"

he said formally and started to the door. A few steps from it, he turned back. "Andrée, if you would only give the police the information they want, I could spare your life." Even as he said it, he knew that it was useless. But he tried once again. "I can do nothing unless you tell them. Nothing."

"I know."

He stood for a moment longer, then walked abruptly out. "Captain Brundt, neither you nor any of your men are to go into the cell. I shall post a guard outside. The prisoner will be shot in the morning with the others. That is all."

Something in the colonel's face warned Brundt against argument. He said, "Yes sir," and stood aside to let him pass.

CHAPTER XV

LOTTERY OF DEATH

BRANDON waited opposite the clock with the crawling minute hand in the Gestapo headquarters, as he had waited the day before. The only difference was that this time he was allowed to be seated. At last Brundt came stamping along the passage, his face still contorted with rage. He saw the Britisher and snapped, "Send him in," to the guards.

"Dolt! Imbecile! *Schlappschwänze!*" he raved as soon as the door was closed.

"*Herr Hauptmann!*" exclaimed Brandon in genuine surprise.

"Blundering fool! You were so clumsy the woman suspected you at once. I should have known better than to use any decadent idiot of a Frenchman! But we got the proof we needed without your help and arrested her, the—" He added a string of clinical filth.

Brundt was so consumed with his own frustrated rage that he didn't notice the color drain from the other man's dark face, leaving it an unhealthy gray. He didn't see the muscles around the hard mouth tauten or the hand that sought the back of a nearby chair for support.

"What will be done to her?" asked Brandon through stiff lips.

"She'll be shot tomorrow," snarled Brundt, "unless she talks. And she won't, the stubborn slut!"

The door opened and Ritter came briskly in. "Ah, Monsieur Desgranges! Good." He looked at Brundt's sullen face and mentally shrugged his shoulders. "Monsieur Desgranges should be able to tell us a lot."

"You heard what she said. The dolt was so clumsy that she saw through it."

"But she talked to him for half an hour last night and for two hours today. People, my dear Brundt, often tell a good deal in the course of casual conversation without knowing it. And unless the person who hears it is clever, he doesn't know it either."

"You don't think this—this—"

"I think if Monsieur Desgranges tells us all they talked about, perhaps we may learn something." Ritter was looking keenly into Brandon's face. The man looked terribly gaunt and drawn, he thought. There was a stamp of endurance on the hard features that aroused his curiosity. "Sit down," he went on courteously. "It has been a shock to you, no doubt, learning of Mademoiselle Santrieul's arrest."

Brandon sat down gratefully. He was giving himself away, he thought numbly. He mustn't do that. There was a job to be finished. He must allay the dawning suspicion in Ritter. "I—well, yes, it was a shock," he admitted. "I thought that—from what she said to me—" He broke off.

"That she was not involved in these criminal activities?"

"Yes. And I was glad, *Herr Hauptmann.* You understand."

"Of course," agreed Ritter smoothly. "You naturally hoped that your friend was innocent. You knew her well in Paris?"

"Yes."

"You were her lover?"

"I—" He hesitated.

"I understand, monsieur. It is always painful to find that we have been deceived by someone we love. Suppose you begin at the beginning, when you went to the café after you left here. Try and remember everything she said, no matter how irrelevant it may seem."

Ritter was patient and unfailingly polite. In that, and in his persistence, lay the danger. He called in a stenographer

Father Constantine

who took notes, but his brain seemed so retentive that he hardly needed them.

Brundt had long since lost patience and left. For a while, they could hear him taking out his rage on the unfortunate guard in the outer room.

"Did she at any time discuss the reward offered for the English spy?" asked Ritter.

"No."

"Or the hostages who will be shot in the morning if the spy isn't turned over to the authorities?"

"No. I tell you, *Herr Hauptmann,* it was only with the greatest difficulty that I persuaded her to discuss anything pertaining to the war at all. She seemed to want to avoid it."

"If she suspected you, that's understandable." Ritter paused.

"Did she ask you how you had been treated here?"

"Yes."

"Did she want to know why you had been kept so long?"

"Yes, but she seemed satisfied with my answer that you were checking up on my identity papers."

Ritter smiled. "She knew better than that. Did she want to know what questions you'd been asked?"

"Yes. I told her—about the subjects I taught, about the political ideology and about my family in Lille."

"You told her that?"

"Why not?"

"No wonder she suspected!" Ritter gave a short laugh.

"Did I do wrong? I had to give some reason for being here fifteen hours. After all, one gets asked a lot of questions in fifteen hours."

RITTER got up and fitted another cigarette into his long holder. "It is never my policy to use amateurs for assignments like that one," he said. "They don't know what to say and what not to say, and any professional agent can find out anything he or she wants from them. However, it's done now. As it happens, it didn't matter. We got our information from other sources."

"How did you find out?"

"We have our ways, monsieur. Did she mention this other agent who is traveling on forged papers in the name of Georges Boutry?"

It seemed to go on interminably and never did Ritter raise his voice. Question after question he shot out, casually and conversationally. An orderly came. "Colonel Ehrwahlt's compliments and he wants to see Monsieur Desgranges."

Ritter stood up. "After you've talked to the colonel," he said thoughtfully, "would you like to see her?"

Brandon kept his eyes on the desk; he didn't trust himself to look at Ritter. In a carefully controlled voice he said, "May I?"

"On certain conditions."

"And they are?"

"You understand, monsieur," Ritter answered indirectly, "that it is not the usual procedure to allow prisoners condemned for treason to have visitors, particularly visitors who are not related to them. Exceptions are made where it may serve the state."

"I don't see how my seeing her would serve the state," said Brandon dully.

"You might persuade her to talk, make her realize that it is the only thing that will save her." Brandon was silent. "D'you want to try?"

"I'll try," he said.

"When the colonel is finished with you. I'll ask him for a permit."

Brandon followed the orderly into the neighboring building. An atmosphere of

tension hung over it. Considering the hour there was a great deal of activity, and the men hurrying back and forth seemed anxious and harried, the guards in the anteroom to the colonel's office were uneasy. He was told to wait.

A soldier appeared, carrying a wastepaper basket which contained slips of paper. He went into the office. A sergeant came and spoke to one of the guards and Brandon heard the man's reply. "Drawing lots for the prisoners that are to be shot."

His eyes went to the clock. It was ten minutes after midnight. He had forgotten the hostages.

A youngish lieutenant, also looking worried, came in, referred to a list in his hand and called the sergeant. "Two machine guns," Brandon heard him saying. "There will be ten hostages, two other prisoners, and the woman. Thirteen all together."

"Excuse me, sir, but has the lieutenant forgotten that one of the prisoners, Robert Vario, died?"

The lieutenant said, "Oh. Well, that's twelve, then. There will be a cordon across the north end of the quadrangle behind which the people must be kept. Lieutenant Schmidt will have two companies there. At ten minutes to six the gates will be opened and approximately two hundred of the townspeople allowed in. Then the gates will be closed again."

The soldier who had gone inside with the wastepaper basket came out again, a list in his hand. He gave it to another soldier at a desk. "The names of the men who will be shot. Have it typed and a copy put on the bulletin board at once. Copies go to Captain Ritter and Captain Brundt."

As casually as that, the fate of ten men had been settled.

The soldier was still talking. ". . . and the usual paragraph underneath, that if at any time before the executions the spy is surrendered, the commandant may exercise mercy. Stadter knows what to put."

There were still six more hours, if he could finish what he had come to do, before ten lives would pay for his. Ten lives and Andrée's. He was almost sure now, but almost sure wouldn't do. He must be quite sure.

Another sergeant hurried in, disappeared into the colonel's room and reappeared a moment later, to summon the lieutenant. "Take twenty men and disperse the crowd that's milling around the bulletin board in front of the building," came Ehrwahlt's voice. The lieutenant issued forth, followed a second later by the colonel himself, belting on his revolver.

Again Brandon waited. Once he thought he heard a rattle of rifle fire in the distance. An orderly brought Father Constantine into the room and spoke to the sergeant. The priest looked at Brandon for a second, but showed no sign of recognition as he went and seated himself on a bench where he was told.

PRESENTLY Ehrwahlt came back, followed by his little aide, to whom he was giving orders. "You'd better double the guard for the remainder of the night. From four A.M. until further orders, have a cordon of men around the building and keep everyone who isn't here on business at least three hundred meters away. Detail two companies to supervise the two hundred townspeople who will watch the executions, and see that the machine gun on the northwest wall is mounted so that it covers them." He spoke heavily and flatly and almost without thought, as if he were giving orders that he had given many times before, orders that were automatic and needed no decision. He saw Brandon and the weariness in his face deepened. He said, "Desgranges—" then stopped, glancing at the sergeant who stood stiffly at attention, waiting permission to speak. "What is it?"

"Priest wants a permit to see the female prisoner, sir. And a number of relatives of the other prisoners are in the waiting room, asking for permits."

Ehrwahlt turned to the priest with some disfavor. He had been brought up a rabid Protestant and though his religious practices had been negligible during the last thirty years, the prejudices of his youth had survived. "On what grounds do you want a permit?" he demanded.

"I have been given to understand that Andrée Santrieul is to die in the morning," Father Constantine answered evenly. "Surely she is entitled to make her peace with the Church before she dies?"

"She hasn't asked for a priest," snapped Ehrwahlt.

"Nevertheless, *Herr Oberst,* you will ask her if she would not wish to make her confession?"

"Bah! I have no patience with priestcraft."

"Does not the slaughter of ten innocent men weigh heavily enough on your conscience without adding to it the burden of denying the consolation of her Church to a woman you've ordered shot?" demanded the priest. "Is there no limit to your tyranny in the name of the state?"

"Don't be too sure your cloth will protect you!" The colonel was keeping his temper with an effort. "Wait there. Desgranges, come in."

He slammed the door as soon as Brandon was inside and muttered, "I ought to have him shot, too." He walked over to his desk and sat behind it as if he were unbearably tired. After a minute he looked up. "Tyranny! I suppose you agree with him. You're a Frenchman."

"Agree, *Herr Oberst?* I don't know," replied Brandon slowly. "I don't think it will do any good."

"Your opinion differs from that of the high command," retorted Ehrwahlt. "Why won't it do any good?"

"Because it only serves to consolidate the hatred."

"Don't you people ever learn the futility of resistance?"

"It is easier to die, *Herr Oberst,* than to admit the futility of what you believe in."

"So the mathematics professor is a philosopher, too." Ehrwahlt was talking for the sake of talking. He was pushing into the back of his mind the thoughts that were tormenting him. His heavy features looked drawn and old. He opened the collar of his tunic, lighted another cigarette, heedless of the unfinished one that still smoked in the ashtray, and idly picked up a bracelet from the desk in front of him. Brandon recognized the emerald and platinum clasp and winced. Andrée had been wearing it last night and this afternoon. "I gave it to her," Ehrwahlt said at last. "I had it made while she was in the hospital, and the first night I could go to her after she came out, I put it around her wrist."

Perhaps it was the reference to their intimacy or perhaps just his own pain that drove Brandon to wound. He said, "I've no doubt the colonel will find use for it in the future."

Ehrwahlt surged to his feet, flinging down the bracelet, and came around the end of the desk. He snatched up a light, flexible ruler and slashed Brandon hard across the face with it, twice. Brandon stood his ground and made no move to defend himself. His hand raised to strike again, Ehrwahlt stopped and threw the ruler back onto the desk; without a word he went back to his chair and sat down heavily. Brandon, wiped blood from his cheek and watched him. There was more than just wounded vanity hurting the colonel, more than the knowledge that he had been duped.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know."

Ehrwahlt looked up. The man hadn't flinched when he struck him and now he apologized; that was something he could understand. He said, "How could you know?" and taking a handkerchief from his pocket, flicked it across the desk. "Sit down and mop your face."

Brandon had a handkerchief of his own, but he picked it up, said, "Thanks," and used it.

"I was a fool," Ehrwahlt said at last. "I knew there'd been other men. When I came here they told me she was always the commandant's woman. I should have known better than to expect anything else of a woman who parades her body around nude in a common café. But she seemed different from the others. She seemed to understand. She was clever. She never let me see her hatred. And all the time when—" He broke off and said, "I don't know why I'm telling you this. Except, perhaps, because you love her, too," he added with a sudden flash of intuition.

"Did you suspect that she was involved with these conspirators?" he continued.

FOR a minute Brandon hesitated. He judged that Ehrwahlt still did not know that Brundt had set him to spy on Andrée. If he had known, and known that Brandon had agreed, he would not be talking to him like this. On the other hand, he must know that the Gestapo had

questioned him extensively. He said cautiously, "Captain Brundt had asked me about her. He seemed to suspect her. I didn't know whether his suspicion was based on facts or not. I don't think I wanted to know." He added a casual question. "How did the captain find out?"

"From his man in England," answered Ehrwahlt without thought or hesitation. But still no name was named. "She admits it. There is no other course open to me. I must condemn her. If only she'd tell us something. Anything that would give me the shadow of an excuse to spare her."

Brandon caught his breath sharply. "Have they questioned her?"

"Brundt did for a couple of hours before I stopped him. He hadn't learned anything." The colonel got up again and wandered restlessly around the room, stopping now in front of a map, now by the clock.

The aide came in, still looking worried. "The police have checked the dossiers of the relatives applying to see the condemned men," he said. "Will you sign the permits, sir? It's getting late."

Ehrwahlt returned to the desk and took the bunch of forms. "No interviews without a guard present," he said automatically.

"And what about the priest, sir?" asked the aide.

"Is he still waiting?"

"Yes, sir." The aide blotted the forms Ehrwahlt had signed and moved the next batch in front of him. "Captain Brundt approved the permit for the other priest, Father Pichot, to see the condemned men. But he did not approve Father Constantine's request." He picked up some more forms. "Captain Ritter does not want anyone to see the—to see Mademoiselle Santrieul, except Monsieur Desgranges."

"Desgranges?" The colonel stopped in the middle of a signature and looked up. "Why Desgranges?"

"I think he hopes that he may persuade her to talk, sir."

"I see." Ehrwahlt returned to his signing and didn't speak until he had finished. "Have this Father Constantine wait. I will ask"—he hesitated—"the prisoner if she wants to see him."

The aide hesitated: "Charles Buisson keeps asking for permission to see you, sir."

"What does that sniveling little traitor want now?"

The aide shrugged contemptuously. "The same thing, I imagine, sir. He contends he was completely loyal to the Reich's interests and hopes you will persuade Captain Brundt that he was."

"Does he expect me to believe the word of a man who betrays his own country?"

"I've had him moved to another part of the building, sir. His screaming could be heard on the street."

"It would have been simpler to gag him, I should think," replied the colonel indifferently.

"He is an advanced tuberculosis case, sir. The doctor warned against gagging him. I was afraid of another—er—accident."

"Oh. I'd forgotten that. Quite right." He looked up irritably as the man didn't go. "What else?"

"About the other prisoner, sir—"

"Andrée Santrieul. What about her?"

"When I inspected the guard, sir, I went to look at her."

"Well, speak up."

"She had all the appearance of having been given a large dose of morphine or some similar drug, sir. I thought Doctor Roth—"

"Since when have you been qualified to judge whether people are drugged or not? You're not a doctor. I am going down to the prisoner in a few minutes and I'll have Roth look at her if necessary."

"Yes, sir."

After the aide had gone, Ehrwahlt said, "Wait in the anteroom, Desgranges. I'll ask her if she wants to see you."

CHAPTER XVI

A MISSION COMPLETED

ONCE again Brandon was opposite a clock that was ticking away the minutes, but with a devilish speed now. At the other side of the room, the priest was reading from his breviary. Within three hours now, Andrée would be dead. Andrée and those ten others whose names he didn't know, whose relatives were even now saying good-by to them. Unless he

Brandon knelt beside the bunk, his eyes noting with merciless clarity the marks of whip and rifle butt, the bloody, broken hand.

could finish what he had come to do before six o'clock. What was it Arnaudet had said? "It is the rule that no one gives himself up to spare hostages." And he had told the old man, "When my job is done, my life is my own." Otherwise eleven lives would pay to let him live. Eleven. It was only a drop in the bucket if one thought of the thousands dying. this minute perhaps, on the Russian front. But one never could see it in that light. There was no struggle in his mind; only pain. The decision semed to have been made many years ago; it only remained now to carry it out.

"You're to come with me." The sergeant he had seen before stood in front of him. He followed the man back to the other building and was shown into Ritter's office. The captain, who looked tired, was speaking into the telephone. "*Zu befehl. Auf einmal.*" He put down the instrument. "Here is your permit. Colonel Ehrwahlt has signed it. I'm afraid you will have to be searched. You see, sometimes visitors have helped prisoners commit suicide."

The search was once again thorough, though this time they did not wreck his collar or seams—perhaps because Ritter was supervising instead of Brundt. "You may dress now." The captain was satis-

fied at last. "You had better tell the Fräulein that the only reason you asked her the questions you did was because of your family in Lille, that you were afraid for them. That you hoped you would learn nothing from her. In fact, you might say that you had no intention of giving any information to us, anyway, but that now no purpose can be served by her keeping silent. That it is not worth giving her life for men who would let her die any moment to further their own plots. You have half an hour."

The priest was coming up the stairs from the basement when he went down. For an instant he raised his eyes and looked into Brandon's haggard face with a certain compassion, then turned away. The sergeant handed the pass to the guard, who shoved a door open. Brandon went in.

He knelt beside the bunk and murmured her name, his eyes registering with merciless clarity the marks of whip and rifle butt, the bloody broken hand. Her eyes opened and rested on him and he thanked God as he saw the pupils, mere pinpoints of black. Someone—the doctor whom the aide had mentioned—had been merciful. She raised the uninjured hand to her lips as the doctor had done before and pointed up to the ceiling. He looked and nodded. He had expected something like that. Obediently he said what Ritter had told him to. She knew why he said it. Perhaps it didn't really matter. They didn't need words.

But there was something that did matter. The effect of the drug was beginning to wear off now; pain was returning. She wished he would go before it grew bad again. She hadn't the strength to resist any more, to try to be brave. She didn't want his last memory of her to be of a whimpering, whining coward. Though that wouldn't really matter either. He had always understood. But there was something that must be done. Her brain was frantically searching for a means of telling him, so that he would understand while those who listened would not.

He finished what he was saying. Had Ehrwahlt or Ritter thought up those arguments? It sounded like Ritter. She said suddenly, "D'you remember asking me the other day what I wanted out of life?"

He hadn't asked her anything of the kind. Was her mind wandering? Or—

"I remember," he said, his eyes questioning her.

"I've found what I wanted." She was watching him with a certain urgency.

"What was it?"

" 'Now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity'," she quoted. "D'you remember who said it? There is the answer."

HE understood. His lips soundlessly formed a name. She nodded a trifle and her head fell back, the cut lips twisted now with pain, the green eyes closed. He had understood and that was what mattered. His job would be done and done in time. And perhaps out of it all something better would come for those who would follow them. There is supposed to be a purpose in everything, so all this welter of suffering, hers and his and that of thousands like them would not be for nothing. The part of her brain that was detached and rational told her that people had been saying that to themselves down through the ages, consoling themselves with the thought, using it as a defense against the crushing sense of defeat, of futility, of uselessness. It was a necessary belief, necessary to the sanity of the human race.

She opened her eyes again and saw the poignant suffering in the dark face of the man beside her. Even he seemed far away, belonging to something that she had already left behind. She hoped it wouldn't hurt him too much. He had been hurt so much already.

"Your time's up." The guard came in.

Brandon stood up. She was already beyond his reach. There was no regret, only pity in her eyes. He bent and kissed her hand. There was nothing to be said. He went out without looking back.

"You're to come back to Captain Ritter's office." The sergeant had waited. He looked curious and a little frightened. Automatically, with the training of years, Brandon made his face a mask. He must get out now and tell Knight. Knight could give the instructions. Knight could take care of the traitor. He would be free. His eyes flicked to a clock. Twenty minutes to five. He hadn't long.

In the waiting room that served both Brundt's and Ritter's offices, Monou was wailing in distress and wringing his hands. The little Turk's round face was bathed in sweat. "I tell you I know nothing of what she did. But if you shoot her, I am ruined! She brings all my business! Where will I find another like her?" He saw Brandon and started towards him, then met the gray eyes and cringed away from what he read in them; again he was reminded forcibly of the devil.

"You'd better worry about why you employed a spy." A hefty, hard-muscled youth pushed the café proprietor's fat belly. "Soft, eh? We'll work some of that off before we've finished with you. We're going to have fun with you."

"You don't understand business! If someone makes money for me, should I ask their politics? And now you shoot her and ruin me!"

"Take him downstairs and find out if he knows anything," Ritter's cold voice cut through Monsieur Monou's wails.

The sergeant pushed Brandon. "Go in," he said.

Ritter looked at him curiously. "You met with no success, I take it."

"It is too late, *Herr Hauptmann.* She doesn't even care."

"What did she say?"

Brandon went through the farce of repeating everything that had been said, knowing that it had all been heard and recorded. Ritter was studying him thoughtfully. There was something in the dead blankness of this Frenchman's face that he didn't quite understand.

Brandon kept his eyes on the floor. "May I go now, *Herr Hauptmann?*"

"I'm afraid not."

"There is nothing more I can tell you."

"When it is over, you will be free to go." If he does know anything, thought Ritter, the sight of the woman facing a machine gun will make him break.

"You mean, not until after—" Brandon stopped. He wouldn't be able to reach Knight. He wouldn't be able to accomplish his job in time to give himself up and save the hostages. He turned away and said, "I don't want to see it," tonelessly.

"Perhaps not, Monsieur Desgranges. I do not care to watch executions myself. It is the apprehension of a criminal that interests me, not his punishment. Now Brundt enjoys executions, particularly if the prisoners make scenes. Let us hope that none of these will."

Again the waiting room. Ritter had given him a magazine with articles on educational topics in it, and he turned the pages at intervals without seeing a word of the print. Four soldiers were in the room, two with automatic rifles; in the corridor, three pairs of guards were between him and the door. And having known, when he came, that he might be searched, he hadn't a gun or even a knife.

CHAPTER XVII

ZERO HOUR

THE hours up until midnight, lessly formed a name. She nodded a trifle and her head fell back, the cut lips twisted now than the reddish shade with which nature had endowed him and studying the vital statistics of one Marcel Manet, whose identity papers he proposed adopting now that his last personality had been rendered useless. While he let the hair dry and attended to the eyebrows, satisfied that the change did make a remarkable difference in his appearance, he perused some copies of the forbidden newspaper which was published daily, in spite of all the efforts of the police to suppress it. A little after midnight, Cibault came down and told him about the arrest of Charles Buisson and Robert Vario. Knight didn't let on that he knew anything about it and listened with polite attention.

". . . and the café singer, Andrée Santrieul, the commandant's mistress, has been arrested also."

"*What?*"

Cibault was surprised at the interest his added piece of gossip had aroused. "My daughter's friend told her. He passed the café. This Santrieul woman used to sing there, practically naked—"

"What happened?" Knight cut in impatiently.

"*Mais,* monsieur, I was telling you," protested the old man, ruffled that he wasn't allowed to tell his story his own way. "My daughter's friend passed the

café and saw that it was closed and there was a crowd of men around it. He stopped to see what was happening and was told that this singer had been arrested and was being questioned by the Gestapo, and that they had closed down the café and taken Monsieur Monou down to headquarters also. He thinks that she will be shot with the hostages in the morning."

"Oh, my God!"

"You know this woman?"

"I don't, but I know about her." Knight was thinking furiously. "You're quite sure about this?"

"But certainly. Tell me, monsieur, is she working for us?"

Knight nodded abstractedly. Would that mean that the identity of Desgranges was suspected? And even if it weren't, would she give the major away? He groaned inwardly as he thought of the things she could give away, if she chose. He took a last look in the mirror; the clothes Cibault had given him made a difference too.

"I'm going. If the major comes or calls, tell him—" He thought a moment, then gave Cibault Arnaudet's code name and hurried up through the little tobacco store and out.

The old plumber wasn't surprised to see him. "Ah, so you have heard, too," he said.

"Where's the major?" demanded Knight.

"At Gestapo headquarters, as far as I know." Arnaudet's wrinkled old face peered up at him, the wise old eyes reading the anxiety and distress. "You need not fear that Andrée Santrieul will betray him," he said.

"You seem very sure," observed Knight without much confidence.

"I am an old man, monsieur. I have seen a great many men and women in my day. Most are selfish. But sometimes selfishness ends in heroism. There is the man who would rather be dead than see the battle lost and the woman who would rather die than see harm befall the man she loves. Andrée loves Brandon."

"Die, perhaps," said Knight, still dubiously, "but those swine are just as brutal questioning a woman as a man."

"She is not very strong," replied Arnaudet. "She would soon be unconscious. And further, I do not think that the commandant will allow them to go to extremes."

"Is there nothing that could be done?"

"Rescue her, you mean?" Arnaudet shook his head. He reminded Knight of a figure of a monkey which he had seen once, whose wizened face turned from side to side. "It is impossible to rescue anyone while they are held at headquarters. The only chance would be if she were transferred to a concentration or labor camp. Then possibly something could be done enroute or after she got there. But short of a full-scale attack which would take the whole building—and that would need several thousand men and proper equipment—nothing can be done here."

KNIGHT got up and paced restlessly around the room, Arnaudet's bright eyes following him.

"What orders did the major give you?" asked Arnaudet.

"To wait for him at Cibault's and if anything happened to him, to carry on." Knight stopped his pacing. "If only there were more time. If we had another twenty-four hours." He met the other man's questioning glance. "If the major's right and the man we want is in the London end, we could lay a trap and have them all watched to see who told what." He resumed his pacing. "I've never felt so bloody useless in my life! Brandon said Brundt and Ritter would undoubtedly know who the man is, and he also said he didn't think we could get it out of them, even if we could get hold of them. And if he doesn't think he can get the truth out of a man, it can't be got," he ended grimly.

"If we knew what the major would do—" began Arnaudet and stopped.

"What can he do? He has no alternative."

"He has two courses of action open to him," observed the old man dryly. "He can give himself up in the hope that it will save her—and the hostages—or he can refrain from doing so."

"But, good God, he loves the woman! He can't let her die to save him. I mean, good God!" Knight was getting incoherent. "It was bad enough, those hostages. But—"

"He has a duty to his country," interrupted Arnaudet softly.

"I know, but—"

"And an inflexible will."

"But damn it all, men don't do things like that!"

The old Frenchman smiled a trifle. "Men do all manner of things. I am not a prophet, monsieur, nor can I read the heart of any man, let alone a man like Brandon. I would not care to predict what he will do. But I would not advise you to forget the possibility that he may decide to do his duty."

Knight stared at him, started to speak, changed his mind and was silent. There are certain things about which it was useless to try and argue with foreigners, particularly Frenchmen. One of them was women and another was love.

"When are the executions?" he asked instead.

"At six o'clock. Two hundred people are to be admitted to watch." Arnaudet put his head on one side and considered him. "The darker hair has made you look very different, monsieur. You might learn something if you went to see the execution."

That had already occurred to Knight and he didn't much like the idea. He liked it even less when, in a cold drizzle, he stood with several hundred sullen, silent people between two rows of heavily-armed soldiers and then filed into the quadrangle which, in other times, had separated a library from a town hall.

The rain seemed to have blotted out the dawn, so searchlights were turned on twelve stakes at distances of six feet from each other. Behind the stakes was a wall. A group of men came out of the Gestapo building and Knight started. Brundt he recognized from his description. The slender, uniformed figure with the cigarette holder must be the new man, Ritter. And beside Ritter walked Brandon. A hysterical screaming came from somewhere in the distance.

"The prisoner, Buisson," Ritter explained to Brandon, adding, "There is always at least one like that in each group."

Colonel Ehrwahlt, stony-faced and erect, came from the other building, followed by the little aide who looked green and panicky. The hostages were brought out.

Middle-aged men, for the most part, and some old. One short, fat man collapsed and had to be dragged between two soldiers. Two were praying aloud and one sobbed noisily. But mostly they were dazed and silent, staring with bewildered eyes at the stakes, the crowd, the soldiers. They still could not believe it.

BRANDON'S eyes traveled over the townspeople, huddled damply behind the line of soldiers. Twin searchlights from the machine-gun turret played on them relentlessly.

His eyes stopped at a face, went on, and then came back. Knight. He'd done something to his hair and skin. He heard a commotion and knew they were dragging Buisson out. Wasn't there some way he could communicate with Knight? Even at this last minute? Couldn't he tell him the one name? Half-mad schemes went through his brain. If he called out the name, Knight would understand. But if he did that, he knew that none of the two hundred spectators would be allowed to leave. Then they were bringing Andrée out.

She was between two soldiers. Someone had given her a coat to cover her torn dress; her right arm hung limp. The man on her left put a steadying hand under her elbow. She refused the blindfold and winced when the soldier took her hands to bind them behind her to the stake. "Must you?" she asked. The soldier looked perplexed and glanced towards the young lieutenant in charge, who shook his head.

Charles Buisson, babbling hysterically, was dragged out bodily, his feet trailing on the ground as two soldiers hauled him along. His screaming ceased suddenly as they tied his hands and he slumped forward. At a hurried command from the disgusted lieutenant, the soldiers propped his frail, inert body against the stake and bound it securely with a length of rope.

As if from a great distance, Brandon heard the lieutenant giving orders, saw him go and salute Ehrwahlt. He was conscious of a detached pity for the colonel.

His eyes went back to Andrée. Her face was startlingly white under the copper hair, the drawn features unutterably weary. There was neither love of life nor fear of death in the green eyes, only infinite weariness.

Brandon felt nothing now. He was watching a scene that he seemed to have watched before, long ago, and which he had always known he would watch again. It was all familiar. The muted sobbing from the crowd. The drone of a priest's voice. The hoarse screams. The sharp orders. And Andrée's white face, turned a little towards him. The glare of the searchlight must have blinded her. She couldn't possibly have seen him, but some instinct seemed to have turned her head that way.

The rattle of the machine guns didn't have the volume of sound that two machine guns should have made at that range. A woman among the crowd screamed and fainted. And the bright copper hair was a splash of color on the wet cobbles of the courtyard. "The woman knew how to die." A lieutenant spoke her epitaph.

"We do not like to have to use these measures, Monsieur Desgranges," Captain Ritter was saying. "Tell your school children that we want the French to be our friends."

Colonel Ehrwahlt was walking woodenly back towards his quarters, his face still set in stony misery. He had grown to love his casually acquired mistress and he was suffering; and Ehrwahlt was not trained in suffering.

"You will be able to continue your journey to Lille." Ritter was still talking. "Here are your papers, Monsieur Desgranges." He handed the identification papers back. "I trust you will find your family well."

Brandon heard his own voice say, "Thank you," as Ritter turned his back and walked off, giving some orders to one of his subordinates.

He turned and followed the crowd that was being herded out by the soldiers and found Knight, who had managed to lag behind, beside him. He said, "Arnaudet's," and was dimly aware of Knight's look of mingled relief and horror as he walked ahead.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN IN LONDON

DURING the next forty-eight hours, Brandon covered an amount of territory which would have appalled and surprised the Gestapo. Smoothly and efficiently, Arnaudet's organization passed him and Knight on from one sympathizer to another, through Calvados, Seine Inférieur, Somme and Nord. Permits for travel had been obtained or forged. Sometimes it would be with a workingman's family going to a christening in another village, sometimes with a farmer taking a cousin to the station in the next town, and sometimes with a more prosperous group permitted to make a purely social visit; and then again, it would be in a swift car dodging patrols at night. At each place, unit leaders were assembled to receive orders.

Never by word or look had Brandon referred to the execution or to Andrée, beyond a brief statement that she had discovered the traitor.

Knight, when he had recovered from the initial shock that the revelation of the older man's inflexibility of purpose had been to him, had wanted to say something. But he'd been tongue-tied, and as time went on it had grown more difficult and finally, impossible. Brandon was silent and unreasonably irritable, but that could have been accounted for on the basis of physical fatigue—except that normally he kept an iron control over his temper.

Now they were headed once more to Arnaudet's district. Because the greatest number of informers had been in that immediate section, and therefore the greatest amount of reorganization had been necessary, it had been left to the last. When this group had its instructions, Brandon and Knight could clear out and return to London to deal with the traitor there. A car had put them down outside the town patrol lines and they had been picked up by a farm cart with an incredibly old driver who carried on an unceasing flow of conversation with his horse. He made the trip every evening and was not likely to be questioned.

Knight looked anxiously at his chief. The terrible lines of exhaustion in the

gaunt face frightened him. Brandon was driving himself mercilessly.

"For Christ's sake, can't you find something else to stare at?" snapped Brandon.

"Sorry, sir." As they neared the market place, he said, "While you're talking to the men, sir, I'd better go to Arnaudet and see that everything is in order. Six o'clock should be all right, shouldn't it?"

"Make it eight. I have something to do before I leave." The cold voice didn't encourage questions and Knight held his peace.

The old driver dropped Brandon off near Notre Dame de Secours, and when Knight returned a couple of hours later, he found Father Constantine standing at the bottom of the crypt steps, watching the major who was seated on the rail around the Norman baron's tomb. "Are there any questions?" Brandon was saying. "If anything isn't clear, ask now. There must be no slip-ups." Apparently everything was clear. "Then good luck." He beckoned Knight to come over. "Wait at Cibault's for me."

"Any instructions for him?" asked Knight.

"I told him to send out my report via Lisbon. Smithshand should get it within five days, even if we don't get back."

"Five days! But—" Knight began.

"There will be no communication between Arnaudet and the London headquarters until after Monday's operation." Brandon paused a moment, then added, "If I have not come by eight, go on. You know what to do."

"But can't I—I'd like to come with you, sir."

"Thanks. This is private business."

"I thought so. I mean—" Knight broke off, looking confused and considerably younger than he was. He felt Brandon's sardonic glance sweep over him and plunged. "I mean, I'd like to help, if you'll let me."

Brandon turned his head away and sat for a moment, his hand covering his eyes. Then he spoke without looking up. "Only the fact that there are two of us justifies my—attending to my own affairs." His voice was toneless. "If anything happens to me, you can finish the job. That's orders."

"I understand, sir."

KNIGHT went to Cibault's and spent the first ten minutes pacing up and down, worrying, and the next hour and a half much more sensibly, asleep. Brandon's voice speaking to the old man woke him.

"I'm sorry, sir." Knight was on his feet looking surprised and somewhat ashamed. "I don't know why I fell asleep."

"Probably because you were tired," said Brandon dryly. "It's five to eight and the truck's coming."

As they went out, Knight shot a curious glance at the major's face, but it told him nothing.

They bumped through the night in the ancient vehicle which seemed innocent of springs. But more important than springs or pneumatic tires was the permit with which the driver was equipped, admitting him to the fortified coastal belt with supplies for a camp south of Boulogne.

They were through the inner fortifications and nearing the coast when the driver turned. "Did you hear that? On the wireless?" he demanded. "That swine Brundt has been murdered!"

"Brundt! So—" began Knight and stopped.

"He was stabbed in the guts," the driver informed them with relish, "and the body was thrown from a window into an alley. They don't know which house it was thrown from, but there are the windows of a brothel overlooking that alley! It is fitting that Brundt should meet his end in a brothel."

Knight remembered hearing that there was a madam who paid Brundt regularly to permit her to continue without the prescribed medical inspections.

The truck stopped at last on a deserted road. "Down there on the right," the driver told them. "A little cove. Pascal's house is down there."

They were beyond the major lines of fortifications, in the zone from which almost all civilians had been evacuated. The few remaining were fishermen; supplies were too low for any possible source of food to be overlooked. The moonlight glinted down on barbed wire. Brandon, following the path, looked back. "Better keep to the middle," he said. "Every foot at the sides is mined."

The path grew rockier and steeper. It

brought them to a small inlet, at the head of which stood a cottage. They approached it cautiously, and suddenly Brandon halted, laying a detaining hand on Knight's arm. "Something's wrong. Door's swinging open."

He got his gun out and picked up a stone from the ground at his feet, flinging it so that it hit the door. Nothing happened. He flung another. Still there was no response. They went to the door and peered in. Knight shone a torch quickly around, shading it from the outside with his body. The place was empty.

"What d'you suppose happened?"

"There's blood on the floor," observed Brandon. He went outside again. The moonlight revealed the whole little inlet and the tiny jetty where a boat should have been moored. "Looks as if we swim." He walked down towards the open sea. The *putt-putt* of a motor broke the stillness.

"The patrol." Knight looked at his watch. "They told us it usually went along now and then not again for three hours."

"Dependable people, the Germans," answered the major absently. He could see the boat now. A small one. "Wave your flash around, Knight. I'll fire off a couple of shots."

"But that'll bring them up here."

"Exactly."

"But, sir—"

"We want a boat. They have one."

As Knight obediently waved his torch around, Brandon explained his plan. It was simple. "And let the men who go ashore alone," he ended. "Concentrate on the ones who stay in the boat."

IT nosed in, a rather squat launch with searchlights and a machine gun in the bow. The searchlight played over the shore but did not pick up the two men lying flat behind boulders a little seaward of the jetty. Now if only the man in charge would decide to investigate and not turn around and put out to sea again! A voice began to shout orders. Four men were to go ashore, accompanying the speaker. That would leave two in the boat.

"Get as near as you can without being seen," Brandon said quietly into Knight's ear. "I'm going to the other side of the jetty, by the house. Wait to fire till I do. I'll get the man with the machine gun. You take the other, then get aboard." Then his dark shadow faded away in the moonlight against the rocks that came down to the water's edge.

The launch drew alongside the tiny pier and the man who had shouted orders jumped ashore, mooring it by a single rope to a post that served as capstan. Only about six feet of water separated Knight from the port side of the boat. The four men followed their officer up the jetty; they were all armed with automatic rifles. Knight's finger curved impatiently around the trigger of his gun. Brandon was waiting, he knew, until they were on land. Then at last, from the side of the cottage came a single shot and the machine-gunner in the bow slumped over.

Knight fired a fraction of a second later, and used a second bullet to make sure, then let himself down into the water and, with powerful strokes, swam the short stretch. A hail of shots was peppering the house, but not a single one came in his direction. He could hear the officer's voice shouting orders as he climbed aboard. The man he had shot lay half in and half out of the cockpit.

Knight got the engine started, then he peered over the edge of the cockpit. Brandon was running through a fantastic rain of tracer bullets, down the path and onto the jetty. Fingers of light from torches stabbed at him. Hardly checking his pace, he lunged forward and snatched the rope from the post, then Knight heard him stumbling across the tiny deck and a second later the machine gun was raking the shore with its deadly fire. A shot shattered the searchlight and sent a shower of glass over the cockpit. They were clear of the jetty now. Knight wished he knew something about the channel; still, there was nothing for it but to trust to luck and head for open sea. He wondered if Brandon knew anything about navigation; otherwise, how were they going to reach the point where the seaplane would look for them? And if the pilot saw a German patrol boat, he would probably favor them with a hail of machine-gun fire rather than pick them up. He wondered,

Brandon stumbled across the tiny deck of the launch and a moment later the machine gun was raking the shore with its deadly fire.

also, how much petrol there was in the tank. He realized that they were out of range of the automatic rifles, passing the tip of land from which he had waved his torch half an hour before.

Brandon was scrambling down into the cockpit. He shoved the corpse, which was still hanging over the rail, into the sea with a negligent hand and said, "Starboard, or we'll land at Cherbourg."

The routine ease with which the Navy amphibian spotted them, circled to inspect them, decided that they were either the people to be picked up or helpless enemies and potential prisoners, then maneuvered the craft alongside and took them aboard. did a great deal to increase Knight's respect for the senior service. In the plane, knowing his superior's ability for snatching a few odd moments of sleep wherever he was, Knight said, "I wish you'd try and get a little sleep, sir."

Brandon turned and looked at him. The light from the navigator's table fell full on his gaunt, worn features. The two-day growth of beard had given him a darkly villainous look which was heightened by the marks of Ehrwahlt's slashing ruler. Something in the gray eyes made Knight wince and turn away.

"I have something to do first," he said grimly.

ON their way up from Chatham, as the car that had met them slipped through Greenwich, he looked at Knight speculatively and said, "You offered to help me, before."

"I wanted to."

"You can now. It's not quite half past seven. Here's what I want to do." He explained and consequently, instead of driving straight to Colonel Smithshand's office, the driver was directed to the British Museum.

They told the man to wait and walked the short distance to the block of flats where, exactly a week before, Brandon had listened to Monsieur St. Paul's theories about who might be the traitor. They went to the tradesmen's entrance, which at that hour of a Sunday morning was deserted, and reached the third floor without encountering a soul. A door led through into the front part of the house and they rang the bell. After some delay, Monsieur St. Paul, in purple-striped Viyella pajamas, holding a maroon-colored robe in his hand, opened the door and peered out sleepily. The sleep was soon banished by surprise when he saw his visitors.

"Major Brandon! This is indeed a pleasure! You have been successful? But then, you always are."

"I have been entirely successful." The tone of the hard, cold voice made him swing around.

Knight had closed the door and was leaning against it. Brandon held an automatic in his hand.

"Monsieur! What means this? Are you mad?"

"I said I had been entirely successful. Tie him up, Knight."

Brandon made a thorough tour of inspection of the little flat and, when he had satisfied himself that there was no one else and that the back entrance was locked and bolted, returned to find that Knight had done an expert job of binding his victim in a straight-backed chair. Knight took a handkerchief from the pocket of the maroon robe which had fallen to the floor and turned with it in his hand. "Want me to gag him, sir?"

"But this is an outrage! There must be some terrible misunderstanding. I demand an explanation. You cannot—" St. Paul's distinguished face was beaded with sweat, though the room was cool, and his voice was harsh with apprehension.

"An explanation? Of course." Brandon's tone was calm and deadly. "Everything of importance that the Gestapo learned, concerned projects which had been planned from here. The information had to come either from those responsible for the communications or from someone here. But there was one thing the communications men didn't know and, until a few days ago when Daudet returned from his investigation, you didn't know either: that Andrée Santrieul was one of Arnaudet's most valued agents. Immediately you knew, she was arrested. You were named as the informer."

"It's a lie! It's a trick of the Gestapo! You must give me a chance to prove my innocence. What are you going to do?"

"Andrée Santrieul is dead," answered Brandon.

"But you can't— In the name of God—" His voice rose in a crescendo of fear.

"Gag him, Knight." When it was accomplished, Brandon went on. "I want to know one or two things: whether Daudet is a Gestapo agent or merely a dupe, and what other traitors there are in the office here. When you are ready to tell me, nod your head three times." He was putting the gun away and taking out a knife. Knight, glancing at it, gulped. It was stained with dried blood. Brandon turned to him and an entirely mirthless smile twisted his mouth for a second. "Better go out into the hall and close the door," he said. "I don't want to be disturbed." Knight opened his mouth as if to speak, then closed it again, like a fish. The bleak little smile remained on Brandon's mouth. "Go along," he said gently.

AFTERWARDS Knight realized that he could only have waited in the hall for about forty-five minutes, because a clock was striking nine as Brandon opened the door. "Daudet is a Gestapo man, and a clerk named Veau will do anything for a few francs," he said. Knight was looking past him, through the door. "He's dead," Brandon added flatly.

Some compulsion drew Knight to the door. He looked and felt sick. He didn't quite know how he got out, though he was aware of Brandon's grip on his arm as they went down the back stairs and out into Russell Square, again encountering no one. He heard Brandon saying, "Colonel Smithshand's," to the chauffeur when they reached the car, and stared with a mixture of bewilderment and horror into his superior's face. It had changed. For a while he couldn't make up his mind what the change was. It was still at the back of his mind, puzzling him, while he listened to the major making a concise report to Colonel Smithshand.

"St. Paul will be arrested at once," said the colonel.

"He'd better be," agreed Brandon.

"Did Andrée—" began Smithshand and Knight did the most violently undisciplined thing he had ever done in his life. He was standing at the side of the desk and he reached out one foot and kicked the colonel on the shin. Smithshand didn't bat an eyelash. He said, "Those are the only three in the office here?"

"Yes."

"Is Arnaudet optimistic about the plans?"

"He said they would be carried out without fail." Brandon stopped, then added abruptly, "Andrée is dead."

"I'm sorry," said the colonel simply.

For a second Brandon looked up. "I'm glad," he answered. And then Knight knew how his face had changed. It was calm now, deadly tired, but wiped of passion and absolutely calm. In bare outline he told Smithshand how Andrée had been betrayed. "And she told me the man was St. Paul," he ended.

"But how—" began Knight.

" 'Now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,' " he quoted. Smithshand stared at him for a moment. "St. Paul wrote it."

Simultaneously the telephone rang and the tired lieutenant came in to announce that Monsieur Rodopin was outside, very upset. Smithshand said, "I see" into the phone several times and then, "No publicity and no inquiry. You'll receive instructions." He hung up and told the lieutenant to admit Rodopin.

The little man puffed in, every curve of his plump little body managing to indicate his bewildered alarm. "My friend, I am so relieved I found you! A terrible thing! St. Paul—"

"The police just telephoned."

"But you have not seen! You do not know! The murderer must have been a savage! I saw St. Paul's body. It was—*incroyable* what had been done! A barbarian!" His English failed and he went from there into French.

"He was the traitor," said Smithshand.

"St. Paul! *Nom d'un nom!* Then it has been he." For the first time he noticed Brandon, lying back in an armchair with his eyes closed.

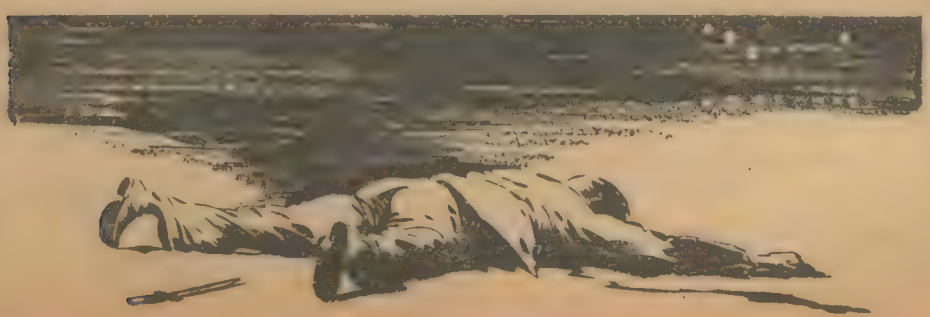
"He found out," said Smithshand.

"You said he never failed," murmured Rodopin.

For a moment Smithshand stared speculatively at Brandon, then went over and stood beside the chair, looking more closely. He was asleep. Smithshand glanced at Knight whose face was studiously blank. "I think," he said, "it will be advisable to have no investigation."

Rodopin looked rather frightened as he also stared at the sleeping man. "*Sacré nom,*" he breathed, "you were right. He is not human."

THE END



PACIFIC HEADACHE

By LYNDON RIPLEY

THE *D. D. Salvage*—we call her *Wet Smack*—is a hoodoo. We make no bones about it. To tell the truth, we're rather proud of the fact. And more so because a wide black band was painted on her wing wall recently. That means a sub officially accounted for.

It sounds screwy, I know. In this tough Pacific stretch you'd think the Navy did the job, but it didn't, not entirely. As far as the records go, this peanut drydock is the only floating cradle that has this honor stripe.

It's all right to tell now, for this happened last May. I'm sure we wouldn't have been so lucky if Lieutenant Partis had been in command. He was the executive officer then and it was Marston's headache.

Lieutenant Commander Marston was put in charge as soon as the drydock came off the ways. Lindholm, machinist's mate

It was the third and last torpedo that meant business . . . and it was easy to see that it was intended for a ship more important than our own.

ILLUSTRATED BY
GORDON GRANT

Sailors like Marston don't come a dime a dozen.

first class, in charge of the pumping diesels, told me about him when he came in for a cup of Java. I had recently come aboard, a replacement.

We were well outside, coming down from—from a Washington port. A Navy tug, the *Takaloose,* was towing us at about seven knots. The *Veronica,* a PC boat, was convoying. It was a clear, smooth afternoon, but a low haze hugged inshore.

"Hello, cookie," Lindholm said. "It's about time the jinx-master showed up.

"Jinx who?" I said, pricking up my ears.

"Jinx-master. The CO."

Renaud, seaman first, claimed credit for the title. Perhaps he did think it up, perhaps he didn't, but the tag stuck anyhow. And nobody used it resentfully. Instead it was spoken with respect.

Marston, I learned, was Reserve, had been grabbed off like a T-bone steak. He was under forty, I think. He had been brought up with leeboards as a kid, become a yachtsman. For years he had traded in the South Seas, had gone around the world in his schooner. He knew Pacific waters from line to line like the palm of his hand.

Sailors like Marston don't come a dime a dozen. And the drydock business is a specialty that includes a thorough knowledge of seamanship. Marston had it just as much as Richter, the old-liner, over there on the tug. As skipper of *Wet Smack* he was responsible for her safety and her efficient use as a reclamation unit. Others did the muscle work: Bissell, the engineering officer; Pascoe, in charge of flotation and wing walls; Pullen, working on communications under Partis.

There was nothing in Marston's appearance to mark him as master of his cantankerous command. He was short and dark, efficient and fair, always even-tempered. There was something in his snapping black eyes that belied his slow speech. But the minute you glimpsed his slight figure on the drydock's deck, you knew that he belonged. And the moment he took over, so Lindholm said, *Wet Smack* fought him too.

I learned that she had eight deaths to her credit. From the time bottom plates were laid, she was a rip-roaring case of heebie-jeebies. Welders slipped and burned themselves. A ten-ton steel plate came down from a whirly's grasp one graveyard shift and flattened three riggers, and I mean flattened. A whole crew of painters quit, she was that dangerous.

And she wasn't so big, either, because she was a double ender, like a giant steel pontoon. It took from three to ten units just like her to float a ship. They were moored side by side, with thirty-foot wing walls swung up on hinges to stilt under a vessel's bottom, each side of the keel. None of the other units gave any trouble—just this half-pinter.

So that's how it was, though Marston was too good an officer to let superstition interfere with his job. It was that way the day I started to tell you about.

IT WAS around sunset when it happened. We were trailing the others, somewhat in disgrace. Nine drydock units were under the *Elder Garson,* a ten-thousand-ton

troopship with heavy superstructure. It had come in slowly sinking, was now going to a Southern California port for finished repair. A bomb had slammed into her quarter-deck with the compliments of a Zero that never got away. Even at sea, work was being done. Up ahead of the two towing tugs, four destroyers were on patrol, two on each side, but it was slow going. Two PC boats, in addition to our solitary, were trying to screen the works.

I was out near the rail, having a cigarette and respite from a hot stove before mess. You could practically feel *Wet Smack* breathe as she wallowed in the oily swell. She was a bad actor, then as now, or else we wouldn't have been trailing the other towed units. Breaking away wasn't enough. Springing a dilly of a leak in a stern cell from a dock smash was the reason for our lag. By rights we should have been under the troopship, lending support. As it worked out later, it was a godsend that our nuisance *had* chosen to be a pain in the neck at that particular time.

After a while Bissell came topside, grinning. "The leak's all fixed," he said. "Who says she's bad luck?"

Marston, standing on the stern, turned, smiled his answer. He was gazing off west, watching the red ball of sun sink behind the overcast that had persisted all day. His black eyes followed the copper path rippling toward us. I knew what he was thinking. It was perfect cover for periscopes and we were swell silhouettes from the east.

This seemed quite obvious because a PBY droned out from shore, circled overhead, loitering. Earlier in the day two OS2U's and a rubber cow had visited briefly, then returned eastward. Now only this PBY was upstairs, waiting no doubt for nightfall. We should have been opposite the Gate by dawn. Then the off-shore breeze, smelling of kelp, brought up words from the waist between the wing walls, which were lying flat on deck like huge shoe-boxes.

"We're ready for excitement," said Kehoe, bosun's mate second class, patting the three-inch rifle. "It's right up *Wet Smack's* alley.

"What could she do?" snorted someone. "A perfect target—full of hot air."

"Check, but don't forget her disposition. She's a Pacific headache. Even the CO never loses sight of that."

"So you want a stir?" It was Pascoe's voice, sounding tired and irked. "We've got a troopship ahead, boosted on those double-enders. And what does a troopship carry?"

"You know as well as I."

"O.K., smart guy. Thousands of soldiers aboard. Precious lives for the winning of this war. Maybe the Japs come across to land at Crescent City. So what? Our men are needed badly. And you hope for a pigboat!"

I guess Marston heard it too, for he shifted from foot to foot and back again, ill at ease. He looked along the sunlit swath, then used his glasses on the hazed horizon. He dropped them finally, only to snap them up again as the PBY plane banked and headed down.

She was off to port some two miles, well forward. Coming down she dropped a depth charge, then veered off. It was a long wait before the mottled geyser plumed into the air. She was banking for a second run before the roar of the explosion reached us.

This time she came in lower. Another couple of eggs tumbled down, slow motion. I couldn't help counting, waiting for the eruption and the dull, flowing boom. The PBY climbed again as the sea reached up. A puff of water and smoke hung briefly against the ruby sunset. A yellow ball floated down and a destroyer, the *Lodestar*, knifed in for the kill.

The general alarm bell started ringing in the hold. On the *Veronica*, our PC boat, a signal lamp on the bridge started blinking. Down below Pascoe's metallic voice carried up. "Well, you got your wish, bosun. You better hope it isn't twins."

THERE was very little we could do but watch. Even Marston just stood there, seemingly planted on *Wet Smack's* deck, waiting. The tricky drydock waited, too, but she seemed ominous, as if hatching up something. She was too quiet.

Then the two starboard destroyers began frisking back and forth. The marine radio-telephone below deck began to *burp-burp* frantically. Marston jumped,

but Partis, nearby, whirled on his heel and vaulted down the steel ladder to palaver.

My scalp tightened and a prickle ran up my spine when I saw the exec emerge running. He said something hurriedly, turned and ducked below again, for he was Communications. Marston looked across at our big tug. His arm went up and he nodded. The cable zinged tighter and *Takaloose's* wake boiled ahead of us. Our PC veered off to port.

Finally I got the idea. We were pulling closer in to give possible protection to our main concern, the troopship.

But this ornery cockle-shell of ours had other plans. *Wet Smack* acted like a thousand-ton sea anchor. She seemed to squat on her two-finned stern and drag. With the *Takaloose* under forced draught, only one thing could happen—and it did. The three-inch steel hawser parted like a cannon shot. It whipped, cracking, around the forward wing wall. A sailor on the tug ducked, escaping the cable butt by a scant margin.

We were suddenly adrift, on our own. I glanced at Marston but he was just calmly sweeping the east with his binoculars. Then Partis was at his elbow again and I heard him say, "Sir, the *Harvester* and *Seastead* are attacking."

"Good," said Marston, easy-like. "Tell the *Takaloose* to forget our cable, to watch herself. There's another sub."

So there we were, in for it, just like Kehoe had hoped. The PBY and the *Lodestar* had attacked a pig to port, maybe six thousand yards away. Now here was another, close to us, with our tug released, to hard rudder and bow on. What a break for her! But for us. . . .

It's hard to say what a fellow thinks at times like that. I don't remember anybody doing very much of anything, except Partis, and he was the shuttle message service. As for *Wet Smack*, she seemed possessed. Wing-wall chambers grated as she rolled in depth-charge swells. There was a queer, whispering sound that came up the circular cassion stairs behind us. I noticed we were drifting fast, not to stern but east-southeast.

Whether or not we were in a coastwise current I don't know, but we moved, and no tug had hold of us. They say there are strange coastal tides opposite Saint George Reef in Dragon Channel. But heck, one hears a lot of yarns these days.

Just then Partis dashed up, excited. "Torpedo," he gasped, "on the starboard beam!"

"Thank you," said Marston, unmoved. "I just saw it. We can't do much, but we can observe. Get every man on deck with a jacket on."

"Yes, sir."

I edged closer, for Marston seemed to be talking to himself. I was panicky, and I admit it, visioning a leaky pneumatic life preserver around my skinny chest. But I lingered, listening. What got me was what the CO was saying.

"Easy does it," he said softly, a couple of times. "Left five degrees, then steady."

It was Balinese to me. Here we were without motive power, without a sound machine, without even depth charges. All we had was our stinking little rifle, mounted on the runty bow. A pea-shooter in a blitz.

Then I remembered. Jinx-master. Something not according to Hoyle. He was urging *Wet Smack* on to take her head, as if she hadn't already done so.

Somehow pigs had got through the screen. They had been lucky at the right time. Not close enough, understand, but if the PBY hadn't flushed the first one the *Elder Garson* would have been doomed. A few punctured drydocks heeling over at bow or stern would have done the work nicely.

"Two minutes," Marston said then. "The pig is off there another degree."

I sort of got the idea for I saw the tin fish skip clear, a good two thousand yards away. In a moment it foamed under on its course. It was suicide for the sub, with our screening force, but worth a try if the troopship was nailed.

But those two minutes— Think it's just a hundred and twenty seconds? It's more than that—an eternity of time when a lead weight grows in your throat and your feet are frozen.

THEN I saw a couple of other white streaks under the green, two more fish behind the first! Marston had glimpsed them too and hadn't turned a hair. The first one was like a marlin, breaking foam in a pur-

ling sea. It began to curve off and I saw that it would clear us all. The one behind it seemed erratic. It finally angled deeper, went out of sight somewhere along the line. It was the third and last one that meant business.

Up ahead the two tugs were swinging east, trying to turn the cumbersome drydocks with their precious load. But at eight knots I knew they wouldn't make it —not in those seconds, no matter how eternal.

Lindholm's voice came up from the waist then. "She better swing fast," he said. "That baby has a paper-thin nose and possibilities."

"And a shallow set," said Kehoe. "Looks like a couple of drydocks get a kick in the pants."

They knew the score and so did I. Marston said nothing; at least, I didn't hear anything right then. It was easy to see that the torpedo was intended for a ship more important than our own.

That's why I said if Partis had been the CO, things might have been different. Partis would have insisted on a new line, I'm sure. He would do no urging to a drydock that had her own way, anyhow. He would not have been what they call *en rapport.*

Marstone moved then. I watched him swing along the catwalk to go amidships. I heard him too when he said, "Be sure of your jackets, men. It's close quarters." As if we didn't know. But he didn't mean it that way. He was getting ready for something. My insides began winding up.

One of three things could happen: We could get in the way of that TNT and be dead heroes; we could stand clear and see something we could never forget; or we could muck up the way of the *Seastead* or *Harvester* and botch the job—and get our belly split with depth bombs.

Maybe that's why Marston made the quick circuit, getting the setup as it was—not that he could change it any. Maybe he was figuring our depth, which was eight feet. About the same as the tin fish, directed on its course with deadly precision clockwork. I tried to guess what a yachtsman would think when cornered on a pontoon's bow, but drew a blank.

Anyway we were drifting fast toward the place where the fish were first seen. The CO ordered the crew back of the forward wing wall, leaving only Lindholm at the rifle gun in the bow. Marston stayed there too. He planted his feet solidly against the dip of the welded steel.

I WAS hypnotized, detached, unable to move. I saw Lindholm try to give the CO his jacket, but Partis ran up with another. Marston hooked one arm through it and smiled, then said something to the exec.

Turning, he spoke to Lindholm. The rifle gun awoke and spat small thunder. The shell hit the water beyond the white water course, then skipped and sank in a plume. One shot was enough and showed us our mistake.

We drifted past as the *Seastead* cut in like a hornet. She crossed the torpedo directional line at a forty-degree angle. The *Harvester* made a longer slant at sixty degrees, much farther away, toward the main prize.

The Y-gun on the *Seastead's* quarterdeck let go. The can arched up out of the yellow flash and roar, turning over and over. Another can came off the port rack. The hydraulic ram off to starboard spilled two more.

I guess I held my breath unconsciously, trying to help. I know I prayed, which gave a measure of relief.

Anyway, that's the way it seems to me now. I tried to figure how fast we were drifting, how far away we were from that death machine that would shave by us.

The first ashcan let go and a column of frothed water rocketed up. Marston, all of us, could see the charge was late. On the beam, but late. Against that exploding backdrop of water the torpedo emerged. It twisted free of clutching foam and leaped clear, glistening and deadly. For a moment it hung there, inches above the water. It still twisted, gleaming blood-like in the red sun's dying glow. Then it dove back, swung off on a new course that pointed straight at Marston on *Wet Smack's* bow.

The CO didn't move. But Lindholm on the mount went briefly nuts. He shuffled, aimed and fired. The shot went wild. It did no good. But it helped him let off steam, which the rest of us couldn't do.

ABRUPTLY the world went crazy. The *Seastead's* stern bucked high, propellers racing. *Wet Smack* rolled, heaved bow up, starboard wing walls dipping under. The sky blasted wide open. A great hand slammed my chest, left me gasping. The ocean between the two craft rose like a soaring, spreading balloon, reached for the twilight sky. I slid, grabbed blindly on a wrenching deck that bent like cardboard. Below there was the crash of shattering glass.

Wet Smack rolled like a tennis ball, banged back again. Then she went on wallowing, drifting east, leaving the blitzkrieged ocean behind. I realized then that four cans plus a warhead had gone off under our nose.

An acre of ocean collapsed. The *Seastead's* stern slapped hard and she fought to right her beam. Up on our own bow, Lindholm was flat on deck. Marston was on his knees, clinging with one hand to the rail, struggling up. From the corner of my eye I saw men in the waist strewn like nine pins. Partis staggered near the cassion stairs, his cheek gashed, bleeding freely.

A tooth was loose in my mouth. There was the taste of salt and blood and my ears were ringing.

I glanced back at Marston. He was standing on the bucking bow, motioning with his left hand as if directing traffic. And as sure as I'm a mess cook, *Wet Smack* seemed to swing more easterly. She seemed to tremble too. Then there was a crash.

It sounded as if the bottom plates had torn like giant folds of calico. A hideous grating, grinding sound came up from below. The drydock shuddered from stem to stern, then she heeled over only to roll back, crunching.

Marston, this time, did his own talking. He sped back and down to the radio-telephone.

"*Seastead,*" he said matter-of-factly, "the sub's under us—the *Salvage*. We cracked her tower, some four feet down. Cut in and contact!"

The destroyer behind us belched a black plume, swung, heeled over about thirty degrees. She tore back, her bow wave bridge high. We were clear again and drifting, settling some with a starboard list, when she reached the spot.

This time there was no guesswork. Air bubbles were already coming up to mark the target when the *Seastead's* four depth charges let go.

Marston came back to the bow a minute later. His left arm was stuck in the front of his leather jacket. He never let on, even then, that the first concussion had fractured his wrist when he fell near the three-inch rifle.

"Cookie," he said, watching the roiled oil-slick spread on the water, "there's a gouge in B cell, but not serious." He turned, black eyes smiling, and added, "Give a lady her head when you know she's right."

"Yes, sir," I said, not quite getting what he meant.

I was still wondering about it when Pascoe came up behind me, grinning. "*Wet Smack* is a tough egg, sir," he said to Marston. "All the light bulbs and crockery are gone and some water pipes leaking. But the plates in XB-2 can be fixed, as I guess you know already. We can get in all right."

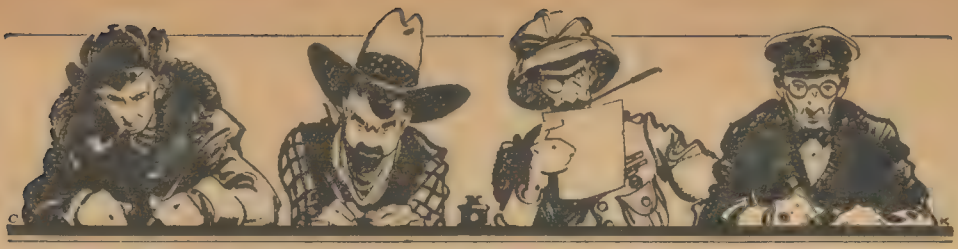
"Good," said Marston. "Now to get a cable to the *Takaloose*."

It was Partis, close by, who noticed the blinker going on the lead PC boat. "Well done," it signaled, and repeated. "Advise on our wave length when ready to proceed."

Turning to go aft, to see what my wrecked galley looked like, I heard the craziest sound. What do you think? It was those troops on the *Elder Garson*. They have no worries if they can fight like they cheered then.

So there you have it. Marston got a citation and *Wet Smack—D. D. Salvage* in the records—got her stripe. It was Partis' idea. He asked permission to have it put on when we reached the Gate. He's our CO now, and a good one, but a little different from our past jinx-master, who has moved on and up. Partis is more emotional, and he has a flair for the dramatic.

And here's something not many people know: That black stripe on *Wet Smack's* wing wall was originally ten inches wide. It broadens an inch at every painting. Leave it to Partis to see to that.



ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

TAILS or tales?

Query:—In a recent discussion I heard someone refer to a tribe in South America with tails. Could you mention any source which would confirm this, or what is your own opinion on this matter?

Any additional booklets or information on this subject would be much appreciated.

—Valerie Pierson
1738 Rowland, N. E.
Canton, Ohio

Reply by Edgar Young:—I have personally seen a great many of the autochthones, or aborigines, of South America; and it is my opinion, based on wide personal knowledge in addition to all printed reports of people and places down there, that no tribe is to be found, in the most remote parts, with any sort of tail. It is true that many live in a state little removed from cavemen culture but all have advanced beyond the status of the androids.

Once when I was studying embryology I ran across the information (I think in the *Encyclopedia Britannica)* that there had been over a hundred cases of babies having been born with tails here in the U. S. and possibly as many more had been delivered and no report made. I traced up one of these on Long Island and found the doctor still in possession of the tail in a jar of alcohol. I also saw a woman here in a sideshow a while back who had a tail which would have done credit to a milk cow.

These occasional rare tails are atavisms, throw-backs, possibly to our tailed ancestors; and while it might be possible to breed a race of tailed humans by mating of these occasional freaks, I do not know that it has ever occurred accidentally anywhere upon the earth.

VIPER venom *vs.* the cobra's.

Query:—In a magazine story I read recently a man was killed by a viper. (Gaboon, I think.) The cause of death was explained in a way that led me to believe that the viper's poison is fatal because it gets into the blood stream. I have always believed that the viper's poison affected the nervous system, causing the lungs to be paralyzed, as does cobra venom. Will you please settle the question for me?

—Don L. Mitchell, Pfc., USMC
San Diego, Calif.

Reply by Clifford H. Pope:—All snake venom has to get into the blood or lymph stream in order to do more than local damage. Nearly all venoms produce complex symptoms, although the viperine venoms are predominately local in effect whereas the cobra venoms primarily attack the nervous control of heart and lungs. The Gaboon viper's venom also causes local swelling as well as depression of lung action.

WHAT the well-dressed wardroom will wear—but *not* in wartime.

Query:—To settle a bet, please answer the following question for me:

What is the cost of full uniform equipment in peacetime for a newly commissioned officer in the U. S. Navy?

I realize this question is a good deal the same as *How much does complete fishing equipment cost?* and depends entirely on how far one can or will go, but to answer this properly let me specify that it concerns one who intends to make a career of the service and requires complete ceremonial and social full dress equipment, mess dress and service equipment in blue, white and khaki. This would, of course, include a dress uniform sword and

service sword. All to be of first class quality and workmanship.

—W. E. Lawrence
Effingham, Ill.

Reply by Lieut. Durand Kiefer, U.S.N., (Ret.):—In order to eliminate as many of the numerous variables as possible in answering your inquiry as to the cost of a complete peacetime uniform outfit for a "newly commissioned officer of the U. S. Navy," I will assume a commission as Ensign in the Regular Navy of the United States, as of June, 1939, and purchase of outfit from an approved retailer displaying the Naval Uniform Service certificate issued by the Navy Department, or through Navy Issue. The cost, of course, would vary with the date and place of purchase, and also with the rank in which commissioned (due to the high cost of gold braid). Ensign is the lowest commissioned rank (but cheapest only in equipment, believe me). The list follows:

2 Blue Service uniforms	@ $40.00	$80.00
6 White Service uniforms	10.50	63.00
1 Raincoat	37.50	37.50
1 Overcoat	50.00	50.00
1 White silk muffler	4.00	4.00
2 Caps, complete	10.50	21.00
2 extra cap covers, white	1.00	2.00
1 Blue cap cover	1.85	1.85
1 Rain cap cover	.40	.40
2 prs Shoulder marks	3.85	7.70
1 pr Collar devices	.65	.65
2 prs Black shoes	7.50	15.00
1 pr White shoes	5.00	5.00
1 pr Overshoes	3.25	3.25
1 pr Leggings	1.35	1.35
1 pr Gray gloves	1.50	1.50
3 prs White gloves	.50	1.50
2 Black four-in-hand ties	.50	1.00
1 Black bow tie	.50	.50
6 White shirts, neckband	1.50	9.00
12 White collars, starched	.20	2.40
2 sets Uniform buttons	1.10	2.20
6 prs Black socks	.30	1.80
6 prs White socks	.30	1.80
2 Working shirts	1.00	3.20
2 pr Working trousers	4.75	9.50
Sub-total		$326.10
1 pr Rubber knee boots *Optional* (but very useful	4.50	4.50
1 Boat cloak *Optional* (but very ornamental)	44.00	44.00
2nd sub-total		$374.60
*1 Full Dress Uniform (frock coat)	$75.00	75.00
*1 Evening Dress Uniform (tails)	70.00	70.00
*2 Mess jackets, white	12.50	25.00
*1 pair Full dress epaulettes	45.00	45.00
*1 Full dress hat (cocked)	45.00	45.00
*1 set Dress buttons	2.50	2.50
*1 Dress sword	35.00	35.00
*1 Sword knot (gold)	8.50	8.50
*1 Sword case (leather)	10.00	10.00
*1 Dress sword belt	12.50	12.50
*1 Undress sword belt	7.50	7.50
Total		$710.60

*Not required for Naval Reserve commission.

Having acquired all the above with your Regular Navy commission in 1939, in 1942 you would be ordered, as a result of the war, to store away on shore all the items marked with an asterisk and acquire the following:

6 pair Working trousers (khaki or gray)	@$ 4.75	$28.50
6 pair Working shirts (khaki or gray)	1.60	9.60
4 Working coats (khaki or gray)	10.25	41.00
1 Bridge jacket	6.50	6.50
1 Blue garrison cap	1.50	1.50
2 Khaki or gray garrison caps	.75	1.50
1 Campaign ribbon ("Pre-Pearl Harbor")	.30	.30
1 Star for campaign ribbon (sea-duty)	.10	.10
Total		89.00
Grand Total		$799.60

If you were being commissioned now or after this war is over, you would require everything listed above except the items marked with asterisk, as I confidently expect that these items are "out" not only for the duration, but forever, while the gray working uniform, like the flying-machine, is here to stay.

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices that have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure*.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure*.

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1619 Mass. Ave. N.W., Wash., D. C.

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing: *Paddling, sailing, cruising, regattas*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 1325 So. Main St., Princeton, Ill.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., N. Y. C.

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Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1619 Mass. Ave. N.W., Wash., D. C.

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait, camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

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Fly and Bait Casting, Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Globe-trotting and Vagabonding—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure*.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, 432 Old Farm Rd., Wyncote, Penna.

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Old-Time Sailoring—CHAS. H. HALL, care of *Adventure*.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign; Wing Shooting and Field Trails—ROY S. TINNEY, care of *Adventure*.

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—CAPT. R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure*.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1. Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave. N,. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Aviation: *Airplanes, airships, airways and landing fields, contests, aero clubs, insurance, laws, licenses, operating data, schools, foreign activities, publications, parachutes, gliders*—MAJOR FALK HARMEL, 709 Longfellow St., Washington, D. C.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure*.

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, 1091 Springdale Rd., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure*.

Marine Architecture: *Ship modeling*—CHAS. H. HALL, care of *Adventure*.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the-way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

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Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 156 Joralemon St., Belleville, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

The Merchant Marine—GORDON MACALLISTER, care of *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—ALEC CAVADAS, King Edward High School, Vancouver, B. C.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

U. S. Marine Corps—MAJOR F. W. HOPKINS, care of *Adventure*.

U. S. Navy—LIEUTENANT DURAND KIEFER, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★**New Guinea**—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★**New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa**—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania**—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands**—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, "Ingle Nook," 39 Cornelia St., Wiley Park, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii—JOHN SNELL, Deputy Administrator, Defense Savings Staff, 1055 Bishop St., Honolulu, T. H.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACGREAGH, 2231 W. Harbor Drive, St. Petersburg, Florida. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

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South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*.

★**West Indies**—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

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Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, *The Courier Advocate*, Trenton Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping.*—A. D. L. ROBINSON, 1261 Ouelette Ave., Windsor, Ont., Canada. **5**★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501—10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 952 No. Hudson Ave., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1211 W. Roma Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, care of *Adventure*. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton, P. O., Ingram, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis, Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, 40 Chapel St., Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, Calif. **4** New Jersey—F. H. BENT, care of *Adventure*. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C., S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 8)

Luigi Caradosso, in this story, states the similar view of gunpowder prevailing among the military higher-ups of the day; and it may be noted that they took very similar measures in support of those views. Boiling bombardiers on the battlefield was not strictly practical; but any captured cannoneer was at once deprived of his hands and eyes—this despite the fact that cannon were comparatively old-established weapons. Arquebusiers were considered to have no standing whatever, and were reminded of the fact, if captured, by having their feet removed as well as their hands and eyes; while users of pistols—upstarts of 1535—may well have been dealt with even more severely. This in spite of the fact that the Church had licensed the use of fire-arms in Christian warfare, provided that only round balls should be fired—square and triangular missiles (as I think I noted in *Camp-Fire* a couple of years ago) might be used only against Turks and similar unbelievers. Unless this edict has been revoked, our present day use of cylindro-conoidal missiles must be a technical violation of canon law.

Captain Caradosso's objection to fire-arms was not exclusive to him; historically, it did break up the party which the *condottieri* had made into a very pleasant one—for themselves. By the year 1500, the battles these free-lances fought for their pay were much like the professional boxing-bouts of some years ago, with the damage as strictly limited and the result just as carefully prearranged. Gunpowder, as Luigi foreboded, spoiled everything; just as—from the point of view of those who like war as it is (and, alas! there are some)—gas would spoil everything today. The consternation of the cut-and-thrust captains, suddenly made as vulnerable as the common soldiers; their new and pathetic concern with humanitarianism, makes one smile first and sigh afterwards. *Sic semper!*

To return a moment to the potion—an anti-love philtre is just as possible as its opposite; and just as likely to be replaced by poison. To validate Luigi's statement that the gold used in the preparation of the potion could be seen floating about in it, I may, perhaps, adduce that strange drink known as Danziger Goldwasser—a sort of vodka spiked with gold leaf.

I myself have often been tempted to doubt some of Captain Caradosso's statements; but one must hand it to the old boy; he invariably turns out not only to be right but—witness the instance above—to be able to prove it.

Maybe he had a premonition that his memoirs would appear in *Adventure!*

AND Gordon MacCreagh is back in the fold finally after a couple of exciting years in Africa. "At Long Range" is his first story since his return. Mac writes—

Hello, the *Camp-Fire!* Here's old charter-member fuel-rustler MacCreagh edging into the light again. After a long period in what the romanticists call "Darkest Africa."

About all I can tell you is what some of you already know—that I'm the sort of prize toad to whom everything happens and all of it bad and there's never any money in any of it. Here I was, over draft age, in Florida, where the sun shines every day and we go swimming New Years and we throw back any fish less then ten pounds—and I had to up and go to North Africa—while Rommel was still there. I went on a civilian contract with an aircraft company, safe and easy, with union rules and the soft living that belongs with 'em. And because I happened to know some of the local lingos the Army "borrowed" me out of my safe and sane job from away behind where there wasn't any trouble and put me to—well, to covering a whole lot of uncomfortable territory. O.E.T., they called it—Occupied Enemy Territory; and some of the enemy in them sparse spots weren't realizing yet that they *were* occupied. So I saw a lot of people and asked a lot of questions and everybody answered nothing but lies. Some of those people had had their lies dictated to them and learned by heart four years ahead of time. However, the Army collected all the lies they could, and out of them tried to figure out what the next snide trick might be.

So I wasn't popular and various low-lifes wrote me letters that they didn't sign and said I'd better lay off asking questions about such and such, or else.

A good snide trick amongst some of those expatriated Afro-European malcontents was borrowed clear out of the witch doctor's box of goods. There was I, having spent a lifetime hunting for snakes, looking for them, coaxing them in, for museum collections, and finding one now and then at a travel cost and mileage worth more than the varmint. And now all of a sudden I'd be finding my camps crawling with more Egyptian cobras than properly belong in fifty square miles of good snake country.

You run into all kinds of base ideas and suspicions along a war front, even when

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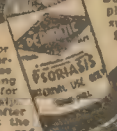

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you think you're lucky enough to be over age to be shoved into the hot-lead push.

I'll swear, the only humorous aspect of the whole thing was that folks would see me around and about and I'd never be shoving a barrow or hoisting the heavy end of something and I'd get to go places for weeks at a time; and they'd never know how come all this "loafing" and they'd say, "Look at that chiseler. How does a guy get to be related to so many of the right guys all at once?" No more than you-all know either.

So that's about all I can tell you out of a couple of years in North Africa. I went places and saw things; and by the time censorship is a dusty memory, who the hell will care a hoot about it anyway?

Perhaps the most interesting thing I saw was a wild giraffe peering through the plexiglass window of a tall four-motor bomber in a certain "somewhere-in-Africa" airdrome; and gazelles coming out of the near jungle to sleep under the shade of a wing.

No—the most interesting thing I did was fly home. Flight orders are issued these days to rulers of countries and to generals and sometimes to a civilian who may be a personal representative of the President of the United States. So me, civilian employe of an aircraft company, got me a flight order, carrying important documents for the Emperor of Ethiopia. But that's just another thing I can't tell how come.

It was a mighty jaundiced eye Mac was casting at officialdom the day we talked with him and he hasn't gotten over his gripe yet. We can't say we blame him. If we were bubbling over with as much rich material as he is, and couldn't use a fraction of it for fear of offending the powers that be, we'd be gloomy too.

E. HOFFMANN PRICE, whose "Sign of Fire" gets under way this month, appends the following notation about the Chinese Society of Heaven and Earth, mentioned in the story. He says—

> This society is not a fictioneer's concoction. It has for centuries been a powerful organization of such extent and force as to make the term "secret empire" not an exaggeration.
>
> It is also known as the Triad Society; the Hung Society; the White Lotus Society; the Society of the Family of the Queen of Heaven. There are various offshoots of this society, some of which are

not Chinese but Malay in their membership, and with a ritual modified to make it suitable to Moslems.

Like our Masonic orders, the Society of Heaven and Earth has a tradition reaching back to ancient times, and undoubtedly stems from the Ancient Mysteries. I do not care either to assert or to deny that this society could properly be termed "Chinese Masonry"; whoever is genuinely interested in deciding that question can in his own time and way arrive at a pretty satisfactory answer.

Originally, the society was fraternal, and quasi-religious, and based on an admirable code of ethics; it did not display a definitely political aspect until around the end of the XVII Century, when the Emperor Kang Hsi, of the dynasty of Manchu invaders, cracked down on all secret societies. However, in 1344 AD, Han Shan-tung reorganized the White Lotus Society, and organized revolt against the Yuen Dynasty, who were Mongol invaders.

In spite of persecution, the society grew and spread; so that in 1851, there was the Taiping Rebellion against the Manchus.

Dr. Sun Yat Sen was a member of the society. His entering into office on January 1, 1912, officially marked the end of the century-long struggle to liberate China, first from the Mongol, then from the Manchu invader. Far from being fanciful, the idea of the Society of Heaven and Earth now going to bat to whittle down the Japanese invader is logical, inevitable.

I realize that the list of names for what probably is and always has been one group is confusing. Yet, not the result of Chinese whimsy by any means. When, for instance, the mandarins reported to the emperor, in 1807, that every member of the *T'in Han Hui* had been liquidated, up jumped a brand new society, the *T'in Tei Hui*. Then it changed to the *Ts'ing-liu-Kiu*. And then, around Canton, the *Sam-ho-Hui*, or Society of the Three Rivers.

Nor was this a childish attempt at craft: for the Chinese always have been addicted to "friendly" societies, burial benefit societies, mutual loan associations, family associations (such as we'd have over here if all the Smiths incorporated as a Smith Protective Society). It's often hard to tell whether you're hearing the name of a mystic-patriotic-revolutionary order, or wherether the "chop" merely designates, for instance, an association of canners of green apricots in spiced syrup.

Although overthrowing the Manchus, certainly a high ideal, was the basic moti-

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vating force, the society did fall into evil hands and evil days, particularly in Singapore. As with our labor unions, racketeers took command. Blackmail, extortion, and the protection of criminals became an all too important aspect of an organization whose original aims were splendid. Thus, in Singapore, the society was finally outlawed, and with justice and from necessity: yet this does not mean that every chapter of the society had sunk to racketeering. Finally, under the stress of Japanese invasion, the original ideals have undoubtedly cropped up.

It is not at all improbable that every *barrio* in the Philippines, which has any Chinese inhabitants, has one or more representatives of the Society of Heaven and Earth.

The Chinese have for centuries played an important part in the industrial and mercantile and political life of the Islands. Early in the previous century, a man from Amoy came to Mindanao, married a Moro woman, and settled down near Dalawan. One of his sons became the famous Datu Piang, who died around 1933, at the age of 90. This son of a Chinese immigrant did pretty well for himself. Once, when an American transport was kicked around by a typhoon, so that cash for the paying of troops stationed at Parang was sadly delayed, Datu Piang dug into his personal hoard of gold pieces and told the paymaster to go ahead and "let the eagle scream." My old friend, Major C. C. Staples, U.S.A. retired, knew Datu Piang very well, and thought he was a grand guy. I cite this bit of history to indicate how natural it is for Chinese, Moro, and American to get along—particularly when they have a common enemy.

I wish at this point to make it clear that I do not pretend to "understand the Chinese mind," nor to "interpret" the Chinese, nor any such rot. I'm merely putting down fictionized portraits of Chinese I've met, off and on, ever since I was kid five years old.

I've had dealings with Chinese farmers, gamblers, merchants, bartenders, the old-fashioned kind, and the kind who spoke Americanese of the most American—and they were all of them good guys to know. Why bother trying to "understand" them? It's a lot easier and more fun just liking them because they're generous and have a sense of humor and do a good day's work, and don't gripe, no matter how tough the going.

Mr. Price adds some additional interesting notations for *Camp-Fire* to accompany the second part of his story next month.

—K. S. W.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

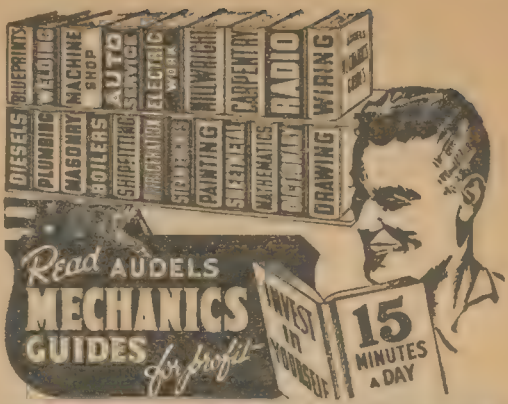
Earl Chew, formerly of Troop "B" 4th U. S. Cavalry, last heard of was a motorman on streetcars in Indianapolis, Ind. Get in touch with your old pal "Chink," otherwise Horace M. Henninger, 905 Irving St., N. E., 17 Washington, D. C.

George Kullrich, electrician by trade, home in State of Washington, whom I met in 1913 in Miles City, Mont., and corresponded with later at Verdi and Reno, Nev. Any information will be appreciated by Fin. Write me c/o *Adventure*.

Will anyone knowing the whereabouts of Robert Lipp, last known to be headed for Seattle, Wash., about July 4, 1942, please communicate with Larry Richmond, C-2 2nd Airdrome Bn. FMF, Fleet P. O., San Francisco, Calif.

Anyone knowing of the whereabouts of Thomas H. Dobbs, aged 71, 5 feet 9½, curly hair, blue eyes, was a prospector in Utah, Washington and Arizona, spent some time in Pocatello, Idaho, please communicate with his brother, John R. Dobbs, Morristown Post Office, Arizona.

Any oldtimer who can recall the name or the name and address of the pharmacist's mate who ran the sick bay at Main Barracks, Yerba Buena Naval Station, (Goat Island or Boat Hill to the gobs), during the Fall of 1918 will do a great favor by informing Bill Gianella, 1042 59th St., Oakland, 8, Calif.



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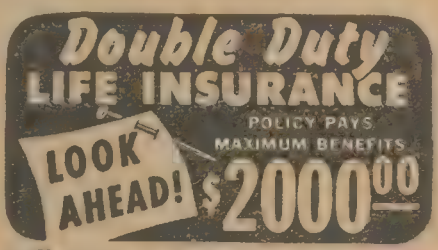

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you'll get a chance to meet the lady, if Johansen, her one-and-only and the guy whose steady she is, doesn't get an idea you're trying to beat his time. The chuckle-laden saga of Jezzy and her jealous jeep-herder who jilted every WAC, WAVE, WREN and WAAF in North Africa for his four-wheeled first love begins in the next issue and winds up in June.

Plus another great novelette by Sidney Herschel Small—"The War-Fan"—in which Lew Davies, masquerading as the Ainu pariah, Koropok, in the heart of war-crazed Japan, manages once again to carry the fight to the enemy's own dooryard. . . . And Allan R. Bosworth gives us "The Steamboat Breed"—a fine tale of a soldier in the Aleutians who shared a foxhole with Davy Crockett . . . "Paved with Good Intentions" by Keith Edgar is another cockeyed episode in the career of Crazy McIntosh, that horse-faced hogger and his world's-worst-brakeman, Bub . . . Hector Chevigny tells a true story of the colorful days when the Russians were colonizing North America from their Alaskan bases . . . H. S. M. Kemp, Carl D. Lane, Kimball McIlroy and others all have stirring yarns to tell. And then, of course, there's the pay-off of E. Hoffmann Price's "Sign of Fire" and the usual informative features and departments you can find only in—

On Sale April 7th

(Continued from page 119)

At the end of the mate's morning watch Mr. MacDuin was stamping around on deck laying for the Old Man. No boiler suit, either. He was the lily-handed department head again. There's a line on the engine room telegraph about him. "Through with engines," it says. The black gang caught some rest.

MacDuin was sore. It wasn't cricket, or even golf, for the Old Man to reach out and grab his spy off another ship.

Jeff Knight was sore, too. His high dive onto that cushiony fat agent was still tops in his mind.

"The world's dumbest detectives, those two," he said. "Neither of 'em even put a nick in the mystery with all their skull-twisting and snoopery. I wasn't working on it, myself."

"Neither was I."

"They couldn't find their own mouths," he said, "not if they were looking for 'em with a bottle of Scotch. It was just one great big surprise to them when it broke."

Suddenly his jaw sagged. He looked startled. His brain had socked him one.

"Funny thing," he muttered. "Those two fancy themselves as detectives. But when the peril they can't dope out does break, where are those two sleuths?"

"On the scent?"

"No!"

"O.K., professor, where are they?"

"The Old Man is planted on the bridge, with his fingers one inch from the telegraph and his eye on the helmsman."

"That's where he was," I said.

"And the chief is down on the platform alongside his controls, with his scrap engines tuned to go. Neither of 'em in their bunks for no reason that makes sense. And both of 'em all out of clues."

Jeff Knight shook his head over 'em. "The world's two worst detectives didn't save the *Cambodia* and the thousands of soldiers in her," he said. "It was a born seaman and a born engineer that did the trick. On the deep-down instincts of their breed. An' you can tell 'em so from me."

"You tell 'em," I said. "They think they're detectives and they think it the fierce way. Me, I think I'm a supreme military strategist by rights. But I can still use this berth as third mate."

(THE END)

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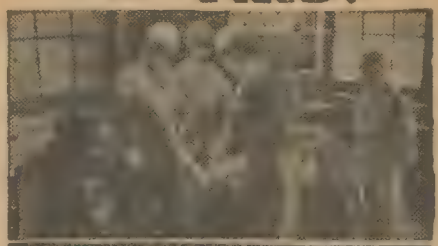

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ICS

(Continued from page 109)

slowly with the swing of the lamp blowing in the draught. The chairs were as empty as my glass. There was no one in the room but the barkeep snoozing in a corner.

Suddenly Cardoux was up and out of the room like a shot. I shook myself and followed. He ran through the mist. I ran, making no noise. He turned into a culde-sac that ends at the courtyard where the baron lived. I was born in that section of the Old Harbor; I took to the roofs, and when Cardoux entered a house, I entered also—from the roof.

I found him in a warm room on the ground floor. He was startled because I did not enter from the hall but from the bedroom. But he did not leave off his work. He was choking a man to death, which took some time, for his victim was bigger than Cardoux.

"There's another in the bedroom," I said. "I have his pistol."

Cardoux nodded and we went through their papers. They were Gestapo—both Boche. They had many useful things, such as identification cards and special maps. Also a great deal of money. But when I started to take it, Cardoux drew his knife.

"Look," I said. "This will be gone by night and not a sou sticking to your pocket or mine. This money belongs to France."

When I said "France," a sound like bugles burst in the cool morning air. We looked out the window and up to where the sky showed gold behind the balcony of the tenement across the court. The baron lived on the third floor and how he fed the poor bird I do not know. He kept him tied by one leg on the balcony, and he was beautiful beyond all roosters. As we watched, he strutted down the rail and spread his wings and crowed again.

"Let's get out of here," I said and put my arm around Cardoux, for tears were streaming down his face.

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Heres the Greatest **BILLFOLD BARGAIN** *in all America!*

3 BIG VALUES in ONE

All for only **$1.98**

- ★ **This Smart Leather Billfold and Pass Case**
- ★ **Your Choice of Emblems and Name Engraved on the Billfold in 23k GOLD**
- ★ **3-Color Identification Plate**
  Beautifully Engraved with your Name, Address and Social Security Number

YOU GET THIS! Smart looking, beautifully styled Leather Billfold with Pass Case to hold membership and credit cards. Patented snap feature locks securely so currency and valuables can't fall out.

Your Permanent Engraved Identification Tag.

Smart Leather BILLFOLD

De Luxe VALUE

Your Favorite Emblem, Name, Address and Social Security Number . . . *Engraved* IN GOLD! . . All At This One LOW PRICE

● Rising Costs of Leather Goods may make it impossible to repeat this amazing offer!

Here, without a doubt, is the greatest Billfold and Pass Case Bargain that you'll be likely to see for a good many years to come. Through a fortunate purchase we have a limited quantity of these smart leather Billfolds available at this low price. If you have *shopped around*, you know that it is virtually impossible to get a good leather Billfold of this type beautifully engraved in gold with your Lodge Emblem or Army, Navy, Marine or Air Corps Insignia and Name at this sensational low price. In addition we also send you a specially designed 3-color Emergency Identification Plate, on which we engrave your Social Security Number, your Name and your Address. This smart Leather Billfold must actually be seen to be fully appreciated. Besides the spacious compartment at the back which can be used for currency, checks, papers, etc., it has 4 pockets each protected by celluloid to prevent the soiling of your valuable membership and credit cards. This handsome Billfold has the sturdy appearance and style usually found in costlier Billfolds.

YOU GET THIS! Your choice of Emblems and your Name richly Engraved in 23 k Gold on the Face of the Billfold. Your name is also engraved in Gold, inside the Billfold.

YOU GET THIS! A beautiful 3-color Emergency Identification Plate which carries your full name, address and Social Security Number. A perfect identification record for you.

● Due to difficulty in obtaining good leather because of war conditions, the supply of these Billfolds is limited. Remember, you get **3 Big Values for only $1.98.** So rush your order today! If after receiving your Engraved Billfold, you don't positively agree that this is the most outstanding bargain you ever came across, return it and we'll refund the money.

Rush this Coupon for this Once-in-a-Lifetime Bargain

ILLINOIS MERCHANDISE MART, Dept. 3000-A
500 N. Dearborn St., Chicago 10, Ill.

If you want a LODGE, ARMY, or NAVY INSIGNIA, state name here_____

Gentlemen: I enclose $1.98. Please send me a Smart Leather Billfold with my name and favorite Emblem engraved in 23k Gold. You are also to include the Emergency Identification Plate carrying my Full Name and Social Security Number.

MY FULL NAME_____
(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)

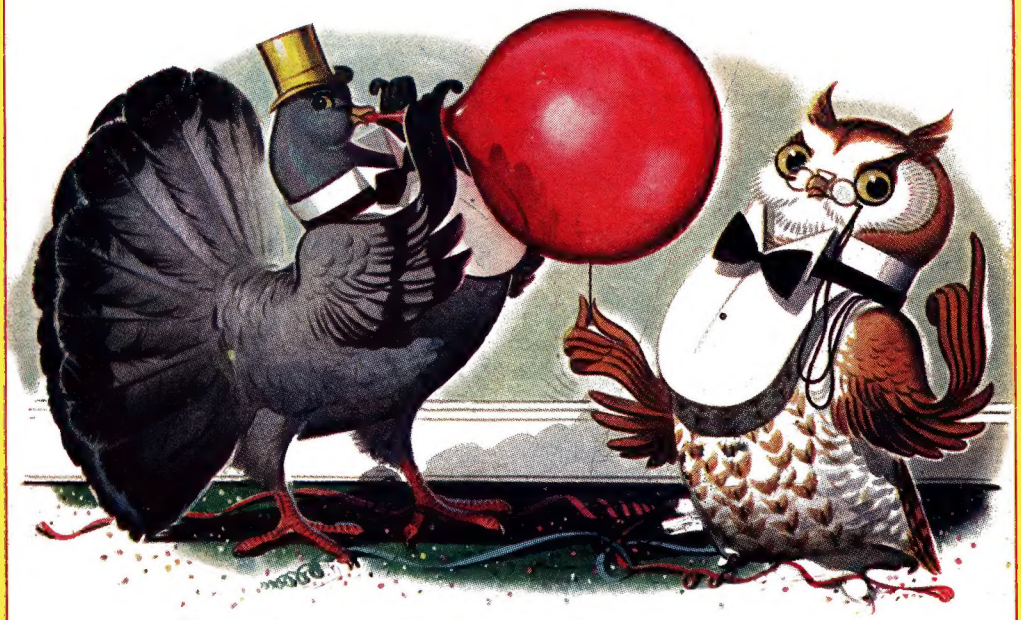
ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE_____

☐ Check here if you want us to ship the above C. O. D. for $1.98 plus a few pennies postage and C. O. D. charges. ● Social Security Number_____

Rush Your Order! OUR SUPPLY OF LEATHER BILLFOLDS IS LIMITED!

Seven things you can do to stop Inflation



Keep prices down! For Victory and your own post-war security do these seven things: *1.* Buy only what you need and make things last. *2.* Pay no more than ceiling prices. *3.* Pay increased taxes willingly. *4.* Pay off old debts and avoid new ones. *5.* Live within present income. *6.* Build up savings and life insurance for the future. *7.* Buy and *hold more* War Bonds.

Clear heads choose Calvert

Sponsored by the makers of

Calvert

The whiskey with the "Happy Blending"

Calvert Distillers Corp., New York City. BLENDED WHISKEY Calvert "Reserve": 86.8 Proof–65% Grain Neutral Spirits. Calvert "Special": 86.8 Proof–60% Grain Neutral Spirits.

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EXCITER